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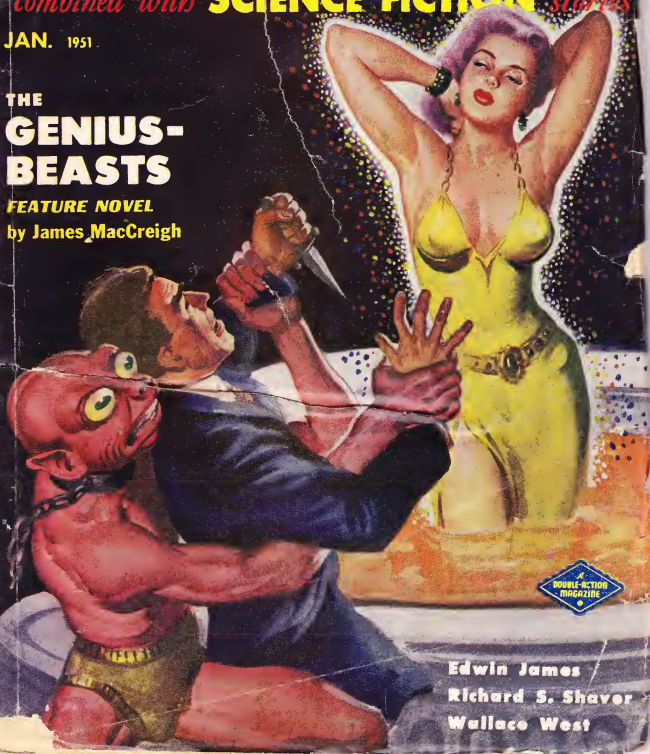
combined with **SCIENCE FICTION** *stories*

JAN. 1951

THE GENIUS- BEASTS

FEATURE NOVEL

by James MacCreigh



Edwin James
Richard S. Shaver
Wallace West

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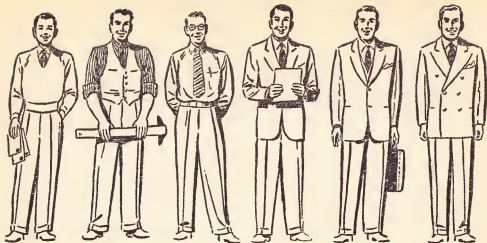
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Volume I

January, 1951

Number 5

Feature Novel

- THE GENIUS BEASTS** James MacCreigh 3
What secret lay behind the kidnapping of Earth people, and what was the intelligence behind it? Three men and a woman find themselves alone on a strange world, and the woman seems to know the answer, but cannot tell.

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A millenia-old plan comes to life, when sleepers awake—to find something wrong with the stars!

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Unwillingly involved in an Earth-Mars war, the primitive Hesperidians find an astonishing solution.

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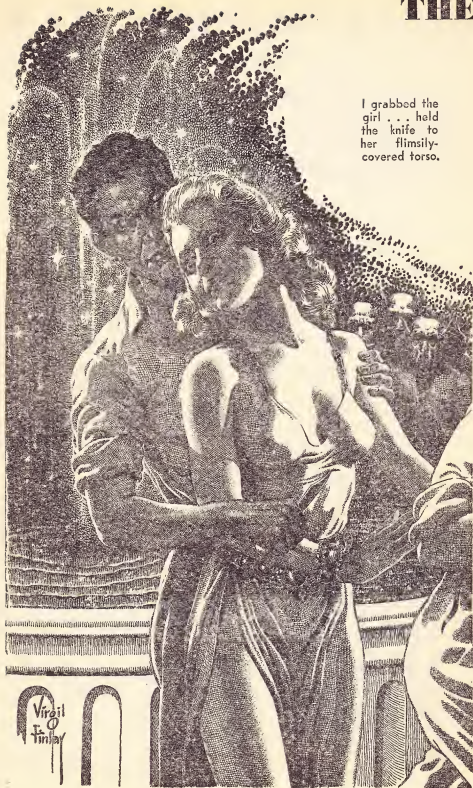
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the knife to
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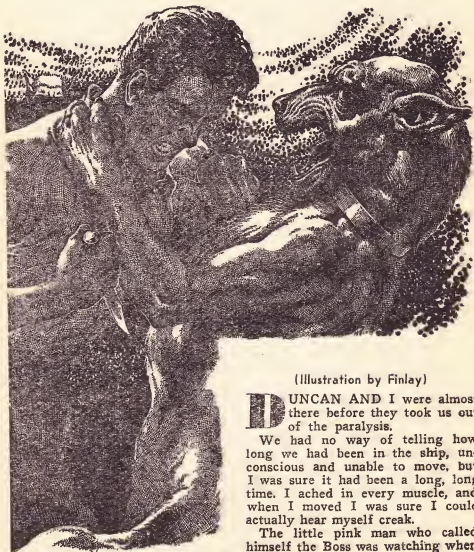


GENIUS BEASTS

Feature Novel

by James Mac Creigh

Alone on a strange world, the only chance for three Earthmen and a woman was to find the ruling intelligence of this culture. But who, or what, had ordered them abducted, and for what reason? For all they saw about them were intelligent animals, which made no pretense of being the masters here.



(Illustration by Finlay)

DUNCAN AND I were almost there before they took us out of the paralysis.

We had no way of telling how long we had been in the ship, unconscious and unable to move, but I was sure it had been a long, long time. I ached in every muscle, and when I moved I was sure I could actually hear myself creak.

The little pink man who called himself the Boss was watching when we woke up out of our dazed condi-

tion. "Don't make trouble," he advised us at once in his excited clipped tones. He carefully displayed a rod-like affair that I was willing to concede was a gun—though it might as well have been a pearl-handled backscratcher. His English was amazingly good, considering that he was nowhere near human. He looked like a toad that was ambitious to become a leprechaun.

"Don't make trouble," he repeated, and: "It won't get you anywhere. Since you're awake I suppose you'll want to ask questions. Go ahead. I won't answer them, probably."

I looked at him and sat down on the hygienic, slightly resilient slab I'd been using for a bed. Questions? Sure I had questions, but what were they? Duncan got in first. "Why did you wake us up?" he asked with more objectivity than I owned. "Wouldn't it have been easier to keep us the way we were?"

"No. You were a damned nuisance. So was he." The last was accompanied by a webby, three-fingered gesture at me. I spoke up.

"What are you going to do with us?"

The pink imp leered. "You'll find out."

"When? And where are we going?"

"I won't tell you. I told you I probably wouldn't answer your questions. All you specimens ask the same things. It's none of your business." The toad-imp was frowning.

I shrugged and became practical. What he said didn't seem to matter very much, anyhow—possibly I was still under a hangover from the trancelike state we'd been in. "When do we eat?" I asked.

For the first time, the Boss stopped to think about a question. It occurred to me that he actually looked alarmed. He drew a thing like a lady's compact from the pouch he wore at his waist and flipped it open.

"Tomorrow," he announced with a glint of relief in his voice, after he had looked inside. "You get one meal before we land. Now you've asked enough questions. I won't an-

swer any more. If there's anything you need, you can shout for it. Make sure you need it," he added sinisterly.

And he left, through a rather circular sort of door.

DUNCAN SAT down on his bed and looked at me. He said, "What do you think, Nick?"

I shrugged. I didn't know what to think. It was all pretty confusing.

Not so long before, life had been very simple. There was Duncan and there was I, and there was broad green water all around us and a little rubber life raft bouncing under us. There were no complications. All we had to do was reach land before we starved to death or overturned and drowned. Very simple.

As simple and natural as a Gulf Stream hurricane. When our cabin cruiser swamped and went down, I went down with it. By the grace of the good lord and the personal intercession of my patron saint, sometimes known as Santa Claus, I came up again close enough to Duncan and his life raft to clutch a thrown rope. The third member of our party, Tommy Cleelock, and the other life raft were nowhere in sight—which was true of anything more than twenty yards away, in that storm. We drifted all night. About noon the next day we saw a plane way off on the horizon, and a plume of smoke under it. There was no way of attracting their attention; we didn't even try. I like to think that they were looking for us, but as Duncan points out that was impossible; nobody would think of missing us for at least a week.

But a bit later we saw the loom of land.

We paddled toward it. We beached the life raft about an hour before dusk the second day, the hottest day of that or any year.

Everything was still and steaming hot. There was a malarial-looking jungle creeping down practically to the water line, but if there was any wild life in it, it was hiding. An unpleasantly muddy greenish stream was seeping along mouldy ground,

burying itself in the sand at the jungle's edge.

We didn't like the looks of it for drinking purposes, but thought it might be clearer near its source. So we struck into the heart of that deathly quiet jungle.

We found the end of our trip before we found the source of that brackish stream. Our life raft, for all I know, might still be on the beach, unless the tide took it away. Though the little people more likely collapsed it and carried it off with them, the same time they took us; they were insufferably curious. I think that was the reason they had been promoted to the status of intelligence. With them, you see, evolution was not an abstract issue that two lawyers could debate in a courtroom. They knew about it, because they'd been through it themselves...

Anyway, we never found the source—because the little people found us first.

All the way up the stream we had the sensation of being followed. Finally, after looking furtively over our shoulders had showed us nothing, we just stood stock-still and waited.

It brought results.

There was a scrabbling in the underbrush and shrill, muted voices whispering musically about something. Then three little pink creatures—I've described the Boss; they all look about alike—hopped out of the jungle.

"Do not be afraid, men," one called to us. It wasn't what he said; it was sheer surprise at the looks of them that kept us from fighting them off, until it was too late. Before we collected ourselves we had been jabbed with tiny needles. There was a sharp pang, like a wasp's sting—

And, like a wasp's prey, we were paralyzed.

We stayed that way until they woke us up. Part of the time we were at least semi-conscious, because I remember one or two things in a hazy sort of way. The pink ones examining us, jabbing us with more needles, systematically disrobing us

and then tossing the clothes back on us helter-skelter. I remember meeting the boss at one point—he was the English-speaking one—and being told that he gave the orders around there; we were to hop to it when he gave us any. He told us that himself.

And I remember being carried to a burned-out clearing where there rested a huge purplish torpedo of a ship—a rocket, in fact. We were dragged into it and put in a room, on a pair of soft, shock-absorbing pads. A pink one stuck his toad's head in the door a minute later to see that we were all right. And pretty soon thereafter there was a hell of a bang right below us and we felt sudden, sharp pressure.

The ship had taken off.

It seemed like a few days or weeks elapsed while we lay quiescent on those pads. Actually, I discovered later, it was a bit more than eighteen months!

I GOT around to answering Duncan's question with a question of my own.

"Where do you suppose we are?" I asked. "What goes on?"

Duncan grinned. He said, "That bespeaks immense faith in me, Nick. I'm sorry to let you down, but I don't know."

"Well, let's figure it out logically," I started, but Duncan halted me with a shake of the head. "There's no logic involved," he said. "The whole thing's screwy. I'm here, and I know I'm not dreaming, but I find it hard to believe all the same. Why don't we try the empirical method, Nick, and look around? Have you noticed—" he gestured—"that the door's not closed?"

I stared at it. It was open all right, just a crack. I walked over to it, and was suddenly conscious of the fact that I had lost weight. I don't mean that I had lost fat; I hate euphemisms. I had the same mass as ever, but the acceleration of the ship, evidently, was less than one Earth gravity. By rough feel, I weighed perhaps a hundred pounds. A little less than two-thirds normal.

I stepped lightly to keep on the floor, conscious of a curious surge beneath me that was the throbbing of the rocket jets, and touched the door. It slid open all the way as soon as I laid my hand on it. I looked out, with Duncan breathing hotly on my shoulder.

"I can't see anything," Duncan said disappointedly. "Look, Nick, let's take a walk."

"You think we ought to? The Boss wouldn't like it."

Outside the door was a corridor, metal-walled, floored with the same rubbery red stuff that was on the floor of our room. To our left it intersected with another corridor just like it, about five yards from us. To our right it ran a bit farther, then made a sharp bend; there were no other doors visible than the one we were leaning out of.

"I don't care what the Boss would like," Duncan said. "He didn't order us to stay here."

He broke off and listened. "Voices," he said excitedly. "Somebody's coming!"

I am a cautious man, so I grabbed the sleeve of Duncan's jacket and pulled him back into the room. I am also curious; I did not close the door.

I was glad that I hadn't closed it. The voices got louder—only it wasn't "voices". There was just one voice, a girl's. She was singing to herself quietly, the way you do when there's no one around to hear you. She wasn't singing in English, or in the kind of tonal music you hear over the radio. It was a liquid sort of language, totally incomprehensible, and the music flowed liquidly also. There were no breaks in it, no jump from note to note, but only a smooth flow. You could play music like that very well on a musical saw—or on the electronic gadget they call a theremin.

"Pretty voice," said Duncan, and I took a better grip on the sleeve of his gunner's tunic. "I hope *she* is as pretty—"

Then she passed the door, she and her...well, it looked like it was her pet; a great big shaggy dog that

walked on its hind legs. It wore a thick metal collar around its ugly neck, and there was blankness and idiocy in its eyes. A hideous thing, all hairy and unpleasant, as big as a man.

She was not hideous. Neither was she human, I thought; probably it would have been too much to have expected a human girl there. But she was close enough...

I believe she was the most beautiful girl I ever saw. Tall and slender, but neatly and in fact sumptuously rounded where roundness is needful; vividly gorgeous of face. There was a height to her cheekbones and a quirk to the ends of her lips; a sort of hazy tilt to her eyes—Slavic, I thought she looked. I wonder how a Slav would have described her.

ALL THAT was human enough—or superhuman. It was her hair that wasn't; it literally floated around her head, spider-silk thin and weightless. It was long and glistening, a pale pink corona that swirled and danced lazily as she walked. Quite a thing. Quite a damnably gorgeous thing, that any woman on Earth would have given half a lifetime to own.

I thought Duncan spoke to me. "Don't bother me," I said, keeping my eyes on the girl. "Tell me about it later."

"I didn't say anything," he protested. "I thought *you* spoke."

That disconcerted me enough to turn around and look at him. "Somebody spoke," I said; "somebody a long way off, maybe."

"That's what I heard," he nodded. Puzzled, I tried to reconstruct the feeling. It was a voice, I was sure, but I had no idea what it had been saying. But it didn't seem particularly important, and Duncan interrupted the thought.

"Hey," he said. "Front and center Nick. She's giving us the once-over."

She had stopped and turned around, and now she was looking at us, her lips still parted but no longer singing.

"Hello," said Duncan tentatively.

Her face grimaced involuntarily, as

though she were repelled by the sound of his voice. But she controlled it and, after a moment, the frown vanished. Instead, her lips parted again and rich music came out, mocking music.

She was laughing at us.

"A fine reception we're getting, I must say," Duncan said disgustedly. "Lady, don't you know any better manners than that?"

Apparently she didn't because, still laughing, she turned around and left. We watched her pace slowly to the intersection, with that shaggy brute shambling along beside her, a silvery wire leash running from his collar to what looked like a similar collar around her own neck. She turned to the right and kept on walking, still singing. We listened to her voice die away. I wish I could make that melody into a symphony. It deserves it.

"Wow!" said Duncan, and he turned to look at me. I had never seen Duncan wide-eyed before; it was not an attractive sight. "I begin to like this place," he said. "I hope she's a permanent guest."

There was a squeal of high-pitched indignation from behind us. "Hey!" shouted a shrill voice. "What do you think you're doing?"

We spun around involuntarily. It was the Boss, racing down the corridor toward us with all boilers blazing and a deckhand sitting on the safety valve. "Get back in your cage!" he yelled. "You're not allowed out. Move!"

We moved, hurriedly. Greatly daring, Duncan said, "Who was that we just saw?"

The Boss' face took on a peculiar look that seemed almost like reverence. "The Khreen," he said.

"She's a pretty girl," Duncan commented. "Can we see her again?"

"Girl?" he asked scornfully. "Sure. She doesn't matter; she's just another specimen. You'll see plenty of her."

Duncan protested, "But you said she was—"

"Never mind what I said," the Boss interrupted, glaring at us from the doorway. "Now you stay here. If you want to get in trouble, just

come out again. Big trouble, from me personally."

Duncan shrugged. "Why?" he asked reasonably. "We've been in here a long time. We're getting tired of it—and hungry, besides."

The Boss' glare faded a little and took on a sickly tinge. "You should complain," he said morosely, but didn't complete the thought. "I told you when you'd get fed. Tomorrow."

"Be seeing you then," I said.

The Boss' frog face split in a sardonic, unhappy grin. "That," he said, "is only too true." And he slid the door back, with a faint click we hadn't heard before. When Duncan tried it experimentally a little later, we found it was locked.

"Oh, well," he said. "We're not supposed to anyhow." He poked the resilient slab on his side of the room with a finger, then sprawled out on it.

"We might as well get some sleep," he said.

I followed his example, but I had a puzzlement in my mind that wanted settling. Before I fell asleep I said, "What do you suppose is biting on the Boss?"

Duncan, his back to me, shrugged. "No idea at all," he said. "Go to sleep. He'll probably tell you all about it, in his sour fashion, when we see him tomorrow."

2



But when we saw the Boss again he was in high spirits. "I like you," he said happily as soon as he was in the door. "Look—food."

He displayed two hunks of dripping meat one in each webbed hand. He gave

them to us and said, "Go ahead and eat; I'll watch you."

I took mine rather gingerly and gave it a thorough inspection. It had not been cooked, apparently, but it was quite warm. I sniffed it and liked what I smelled, so I took a nibble.

I've tasted worse. It was odd, but edible. If you fed a pig on herring for a couple of months before slaughtering him, then smoked the hams in the fumes of Chinese incense, it might taste like that. It wasn't unbearably bad, once you got used to it.

Finding the Boss in a good humor was so unexpected that we didn't take advantage of it for a while. When I'd finished gnawing on my chunk of meat I broke the conversational ice. "Why wouldn't you let us look out the door yesterday?" I asked tentatively. "Was it that girl? Is she tabu or something?"

He grinned, but amiably. "I won't tell you. Don't you know that I'll tell you hardly anything?"

"I'm beginning to find out," I agreed, quite sincerely.

His face clouded as though I had hurt his feelings. He said, "I'll tell you one thing, because I like you. Today we land. This is the end of our voyage—and I've finished another trip alive!"

I gaped at him. He was positively beamish over his triumph of survival, grinning to himself like a moonstruck leprechaun. "Shall I show you something?" he whispered conspiratorially. "Something you'd like to see? I oughtn't to do it, but it doesn't matter. And I like you. Shall I show you?"

"Sure," said Duncan. I nodded eagerly.

"All right," said the Boss. He opened the door, stepped out into the corridor. "Come on," he said.

We followed him, Duncan and I. We turned to the right at the door, followed along the corridor to where it made its sharp bend to the left, then walked a few paces along the new corridor. He stopped before a

door and craned his thick neck anxiously to look at us.

"Do you know why I like you?" he asked suddenly. "It is not because of anything you did. You are rather loathesome to me, you know. Oh, it's not your fault; all of you specimens are basically revolting, when you come right down to it. You can't help it... I like you," he said, "because you do not eat very much."

He grinned happily. "You don't understand?" he said in high good humor. "Of course you don't; you weren't expected to. Now, we will go in here. Conduct yourselves well, because I will kill you if you get me in trouble. I would have no compunctions. I don't like you very well."

With a grand gesture he flung the door open and motioned us in.

WE FOUND ourselves in a large room. It was filled with some of the most fantastic hunks of gadgetry you'll see in a month of Whitsuntides. "Jeepers," said Duncan, and it expressed my feelings perfectly.

There were machines in the room...but such machines as I had never come across before. Little ones and big ones; square ones and one that seemed to be made out of odds and ends of runny tar and crepe paper—shapeless.

One of the gadgets dominated the entire thirty-foot room. It would have dominated any room. It was quite sensational.

There was a shallow tank of an orange liquid, rectangular, with a fountain coming up out of the middle. It was decorative—a curious flashing jet of brilliant orange—but its function was not merely decoration. For there was a small group standing in the pool, two or three pinkies, a couple of the dog-beasts, and the girl.

"What a way to take a shower," Duncan breathed over my shoulder.

That's what it looked like. From the falling orange spray, from the jet of the fountain itself, from the surface of the pool, droplets of what

looked like pure radiant energy were forming, drifting about and dropping back to the pool. Fat orange sparks, that weren't electricity because they didn't crackle or spit, just collected and floated lazily around and down. Where they were drifting the thickest, there stood the pinkies and their companions, standing there with eyes closed and expressions of seraphic rapture on their faces, letting the sparks, or whatever, soak into them.

I heard the Boss puffing contentedly beside me. "What is it?" I asked him. "What are they doing?"

It was a stupid question, of course, because I knew what his answer would be. "I won't tell you," he said delightedly. "Anyway, that's not what I brought you here to see. I wanted—Hey! Come back!"

He was talking to Duncan's back. Duncan's front, followed by the rest of Duncan, was heading purposefully toward the tank, and the girl.

The Boss shrieked in pure rage and jumped for Duncan. He leaped on his back, dragging him back toward me. I stood paralyzed. Duncan grunted, "What—what's the matter," half choked by the Boss' throttling arm.

"Animal! Beast! I told you to obey orders! It is death for you if you touch the life-waters!" He released Duncan and jumped back, panting heavily, his hand close to the paralysis needle he carried in his belt.

Duncan shrugged. "All right," he said; "I just wanted to talk to the girl."

"Talk! Hah! You couldn't understand her. You think our people bother to learn your stupid tongue?"

"You did," Duncan pointed out. "Besides, you said she was a specimen too. From Earth, like us, I take it?"

The Boss snorted. Aggrievedly he said, "Never mind about her. This is what I get for being good to you. Animals!"

"Sorry," said Duncan in resignation. "Lead on, Boss."

He scowled blackly, then jerked his thumb to the far corner of the

room. "Over there," he said bitterly.

In the corner was another door. We marched over to it—or glided might be a better word, because our Earth-trained strides gave us an odd bounce at every step in the light drag. The Boss flung the door open.

"Look inside," he ordered, his tone becoming more calm.

We looked. The sparks from the tank were drifting about and, though they weren't very dense, it was strangely hard to see through an atmosphere that was all cluttered up with fat, luminescent hunks of orangeness. Where they were thickest it was like trying to look down into the waters off Bermuda on a muggy August night when a boat has just stirred up the plankton.

But I looked, and I saw, finally, who it was that was sitting there, staring at me with a curiously angry expression on his face. I might not have recognized him at first, but he said, "Hi-ya, palsies," and that clinched it. It was Tommy Cleelock, raised from the dead.

BUT HE WAS drowned," Duncan objected. I shook my head.

"Not Tommy," I told him. "He'll never drown. Born to hang."

Cleelock got up and walked over to us. "So they got you too," he observed, and I saw that he was white-lipped. His voice was taut, too, though his words were easy enough.

"Surprised to see us, Tommy?" I asked inanely. "Well, we're surprised—"

"Nah," he said; "they told me you were alive. Didn't know you were on this ship, but I had a pretty good idea you might be."

"Oh," I said. There was a brief silence. Then Duncan said: "Well, I'm surprised. What are you doing here?"

"Same thing you are," he told us. "How do you like being a human sacrifice?"

"Human sacrifice?"

Tommy grinned mirthlessly, jerked a thumb at the Boss. "Ask him?"

The Boss frowned. "You are mak-

ing trouble," he accused. "You specimens will not be hurt; you are wanted only for research."

"Sure, research. Like vivisection, for instance."

The Boss tossed his head and didn't deign to answer.

"Look," I said earnestly to Tommy, "tell me more about this. I want to know what you're talking about."

"Oh, it's nothing," Tommy said morosely. "Just don't count on ever seeing home again, that's all. We're going to Ganymede."

"Ganymede? What's Ganymede?"

"Ganymede," Tommy explained, "is one of the moons of Jupiter. The planet. That's where we're going."

"Oh," I said. I will say for myself that I took that calmly enough—after all, the signs had been pointed straight to something of the sort. "Uh—why Ganymede?" I asked.

"Because that's where he comes from." Tommy pointed again to the Boss.

The Boss nodded, grinning widely. "Naturally, I come from Ganymede," he said superiorly. "You didn't think Mars, did you? You thought maybe people lived on Mars, that dry old place? Ho-ho-ho! Stupid!"

"All right," I said pacifically. "Anyway, what I'm interested in is—what happens to us when we get there?"

Tommy said earnestly, "If I knew the answer to that, I'd sell you the information at a million dollars a word. That character—" he pointed again at the Boss—"gives double talk, exclusively."

"You'll find out," the Boss said cryptically. He yawned, showing a mouth full of randomly-spaced teeth. "I leave you for a while," he announced, and closed the door from outside. Apparently he was going over to chat with his spark-bathing friends.

Tommy shook his head mournfully. "To think I taught him everything he knows," he observed. "Gratitude!"

"What did you teach him?" I asked.

"Everything!" He leaned back against a bulkhead and looked sad.

"I lost you, see, during the storm. I see Duncan go off with the stern life raft, and I drag the other one out of the cabin. I get it into the drink and fall in with it, and the next thing I see of anything but water, I'm drifting onto this island. I go ashore and wander around. Everything goes fine, until all of a sudden I see things moving. It's these little pink devils. One of them sneaks up on me, and stabs me when I'm not looking, and—zap, I'm out like a light." He glared at me.

"I didn't do it," I protested hastily. "What then?"

"Well—" he scratched his head. "Then come things I don't understand. I wake up, and I'm in this thing, which according to the Boss is a rocket ship. Only he doesn't tell me this at that time, because at that time he doesn't speak any English. So I teach it to him."

"You do—I mean, you did?" I thought it over. "We've been gone longer than I thought, maybe. His grammar stinks, but it's no worse than yours. Must have taken him months to learn it."

TOMMY shook his head. "Don't interrupt," he said. "First, you're right; we've been gone longer than you thought. Don't know how long, but it's months—the Boss told me. Second, it didn't take him long to learn English. All I did was talk. He caught on like a knitted sweater in a barbed-wire fence. He sat there in my cell, with his pet baboon scratching fleas next to him, watching me until I got nervous. Then he began pointing to things. I'm no dope; I got the idea quick. I told him the names of everything in sight, and acted out a couple of simple verbs, and by and by all I had to do was answer his questions. Amazing."

"How long did it take?" I asked curiously.

"You won't believe me."

"How long?"

He sighed. "Two days."

I straightened up and gave him the eye. "Cleelock," I said, "you're a cockeyed liar."

He shrugged without resentment. "I told you," he reminded me. "I wouldn't have believed it either. But the little son never forgot a thing. It was terrific. I guess he doesn't believe in sleep, or something—I passed out twice the first day, still talking, before he would believe that I had to get a little rest. Yammer, yammer, yammer. I never heard so much talking in my life. We talked about everything under the sun." He shook his head. "He asked more questions than the Internal Revenue bureau. I—I had an idea somebody was helping him with his homework, if you get what I mean. Suggesting questions to him, helping him figure out the answers. But there wasn't anybody else in the room."

"Did he tell you anything about what they plan to do with us?"

"A couple of things. He said we were going to Ganymede, and, no, I'd never go back. He said something that sounded very unpleasant about surgical tests—then he clammed up." A troubled look came into Cleelock's eyes. Slowly he said, "One funny thing he told me—I don't get it, exactly. I was describing a dog to him. He got all excited, then he decided that he was a dog."

"Huh," I said. "Maybe he meant he was an animal."

"No, I don't think so—at least, not exactly. Later on I began on class nouns. He let 'animal' go by without an objection, but when I came to 'pet', he decided he was one of those. You know what that means?"

I thought it over. "Pet," I said. "You mean he's just a domestic animal?"

Cleelock spread his palms. "You know as much as I do," he said. "But that's the impression I got—except that, if they don't run their planet, who does?"

Duncan, with his jaw hanging, snapped it shut and nodded wisely. "The girl," he said.

I said, "No—not according to the Boss. Remember? He said she was a specimen like us."

Cleelock brushed me off. "Girl?" he asked. "What girl?"

"Why, the red-head in the corri-

dor. The slick-chick soprano."

But Tommy hadn't seen the girl at all. When we finished telling him about her he was all excited. "This might not be so bad, hey?" he said, his eyes glittering. "She sounds like a knockout."

Before I could think of a good squelching remark the Boss came back. "Visit's over," he said, staring in at us through the door. "We go back to your cage."

Tommy glared at him. "I could dislike you," he said. Then, significantly, "I'm getting a little hungry, by the way."

The Boss flinched. "You are not," he protested feebly; "you just ate."

I asked, "What's the gag?"

"Don't you know?" Cleelock laughed in somber glee. "It's the only thing we've got on these characters. Have you eaten yet?"

"Why, sure."

"What did you have?"

I was puzzled. "Some kind of meat; it was raw, but it tasted all right."

Cleelock nodded superiorly. "Know what it was?" he asked.

"No." I looked curiously at the Boss, who seemed acutely unhappy. Then I got it, and gasped. "You mean that meat—"

"Yep," said Tommy. "What you ate was a piece of pink devil. It's the only kind of food they carry."

3



I GAVE up eating for the rest of the trip. Fortunately, that was only a matter of a few hours, but the way I felt I never wanted to eat again anyhow. The Boss wasn't exactly my own race, but he spoke English and seemed intel-

ligent...and cannibalism had never appealed to me.

Duncan and I talked it over rather unhappily, and came to no important conclusion. It seemed so revoltingly impossible—but the Boss hadn't denied it.

We let it go, and lay back on our slabs to brood over the whole thing. A couple hours after we left Tommy Cleelock the Boss came into our cubbyhole and ordered us to stay on the slabs. Then he departed, and presently we felt the ship begin to slam around as though it were being jockeyed in for a landing—which, obviously, it was. There was one final jolt, and a bump, and the throbbing of the engines died.

The Boss and one of his pink helpers trotted in. They prodded us down the corridor to the exit hatch, picking up Tommy Cleelock on the way.

We came out onto a landscape with a lavender sky.

"So this is Ganymede," Duncan breathed. "Flat, isn't it?"

I agreed with him. There wasn't a mountain in sight. Maybe time and erosion did it—Ganymede, I found out later, is an ancient, ancient world—or maybe it was that way to begin with. But the only thing that broke the level of the horizon was a group of immense spires maybe fifteen miles away.

Duncan pointed to it. He said, "That looks like a pretty big city. Bigger than New York even, maybe."

"Maybe," said Cleelock derisively. "Those buildings are a good mile high."

"Come on, come on," the Boss said in his peevish, high-pitched voice. "Don't keep us waiting." I looked behind us, and the Boss had been joined by a couple more pinkies, conveying the gorgeous girl and her beast. A couple more pinkies were trotting around the corridors on what seemed to be urgent errands, but I didn't bother to watch them. I was looking at the girl.

I took a good look at her, and by the fact that Cleelock was breathing hard I could tell that he was doing

the same. Nearby and in daylight, she was prettier than I had imagined. I could see, though, that she was not the human being I'd taken her for. What the Boss said about her being a specimen like us crossed my mind, but I brushed it aside. Like us she was not. Her whole build was too delicate, too slight for humanity and the pinkish aurelle that hung about her head was much too fine to be the hair of a human.

"I said come on," snapped the Boss, and nudged us toward a thing on wheels. It was more like a canoe than a car, but we got in, all of us, and the pinky who sat in front fiddled with some push-buttons and the car began to move. It was headed off at a right angle from the direction of the city, and I was about to say something about it, when we rounded the stern of the purple rocket. I saw another city spread before us.

But it wasn't much of a city.

I took a quick look at the one behind us for comparison. There was no comparison. When the one on the horizon was tall and slender, this one was squat and ugly. The one was a spiry fairyland of towers; the other an alphabet-block collection of cubes.

"Wouldn't you know it?" murmured Cleelock. "We end up in a Ganymedan slum."

"Shut up," the Boss said petulantly. I stole a look at him. His unpredictable mood had changed again; where a couple of hours before he had been almost affable, now he was his customary surly self.

THE CAR skidded as the driver twirled a little rod, and came round in an arc to head for the nearest of the cubes. I could see at close range, that the buildings hadn't even windows to recommend them—nothing but a blank facade of what looked like cheap stucco.

"Maybe they'll let us live in the rocket," Duncan suggested. "This place doesn't look like home to me."

The car skidded to a stop before our destined cube and, on orders from the Boss, we hopped out and walked inside. We all three had to

band over to enter, because the frame of the door was cut for someone about five feet four or less. Inside, the ceilings were a uniform six feet above the floor, a fact which I deduced from the angle at which six-foot-one Tommy Cleelock's head was bent.

We were assailed by a loud metallic clanging. "What the devil," Cleelock said. "What's that noise?"

We listened. "Air pumps, maybe?" I guessed. It was a rhythmic clash, and it sounded like air pumps if it sounded like anything at all. But so loud!

"Fine," said Duncan in complete disgust. "What do you make of that? These people build terrific rocket ships, but when it comes to a simple thing like an air-conditioning system they fall flat on their faces. I never heard so much noise."

"Maybe they like noise," I guessed; "maybe they don't care."

Before we could carry the conversation any farther the witch-girl interrupted. Staring at us, she trilled something musical—not to us, but almost as though she were just lightly bursting into song. But there was an answer from the Boss. He ripped off a brief burst of melody—I thought that, compared to her, he was a little flat—and then scowled at me.

"Do you specimens need to sleep now?" he asked gruffly.

I looked at the others, who seemed rested enough. I said, "No."

"How about eating?"

"Well—" I hesitated over the answer. "If it's true about eating you—"

He winced. "That was only on the ship," he said hastily. "Here we have other things—plants, or something. Whatever you specimens usually eat."

"That would be fine," I said.

WE ATE pale blue, thick-stemmed ferns. They were peppery, but the Boss snapped pettishly that they were all right. "Better than you deserve," he added. "Anyway, you won't have to worry about eating much longer, proba-

bly—" a remark which I considered in notoriously bad taste.

Duncan chopped off a fern stem with a dull flat knife they had given us and stared at the girl. She was standing near us, day-dreaming. Apparently she didn't bother to eat any more than the rest of this nightmare bunch but Duncan tried offering her a piece of fern. It got him but nowhere...she looked through, over and beyond him, but never eye to eye. She wasn't avoiding him deliberately; he just plain didn't make any impression.

"Where's her two-legged sheep-dog?" Duncan asked suddenly. Reminded, I looked around, but the animal wasn't in the room.

Cleelock volunteered, "The Boss took it out for a walk. Didn't you see? The gal had a collar around her neck, attached to the leash. She took it off, and the Boss put it on, and the two of them walked out, him and the beast." He chuckled. "That's a terrific arrangement they have," he commented. "Both the Boss and the dog wear collars when they go out walking—you can hardly tell which is master and which is dog."

When the Boss came back, he had the animal with him sure enough, and both wore the flat silvery collars.

The Boss said, in a tone that was new and surprising simply because it was tranquil "Come along with us, all three of you." He looked at the girl and a ripple of music came from his batrachian lips. She trilled a reply, showing interest in the proceedings for the first time, and he turned and led us out of the room.

In the hall, the raucous clangor of the air pumps was twice as bad as in the room where we had been fed. We faced it with gritted teeth and allowed ourselves to be conducted to what looked to be an elevator. We all got in, the Boss pushed a button and closed the door; a second's wait and the door opened.

"Well," said Cleelock. "Things are looking up. I like their no-jar elevators."

I nodded. After their unpleasant-

ly inefficient air-conditioning, this latest taste of Ganymedan technology had been a pleasant surprise. There hadn't been a hint of jolting or motion, yet now we were looking out on another corridor, this one broad and well-lighted.

The Boss led the way. He took us to a large room that looked like, and turned out to be, a surgery.

"Hey," said Cleelock in an alarmed tone. "Boss, what are you planning to do here?"

"Test you," the Boss said. "Sit down."

"Test us for what?"

The Boss shrugged—or tried to shrug; his shoulders were of about the same dimensions as his neck, and all he achieved was a sort of twitch. "To see what we can do with you, of course," he said. He pointed to the red-head. "For instance, we might give you the treatment we gave her."

I looked at the girl. Whatever the "treatment" was, she didn't seem in terribly bad shape. Extra good shape, in fact, I would have said. But still—

"What's the treatment like?" I asked. "What did you do to her? Was she like us once?"

"Like you? No. She was female. And much smaller."

"But what did you do to her?" I begged.

IDLACIDLY the Boss waved a hand. "What we did to her," he said serenely, "was what was done once to all of us. She came from your dirty little planet, and was captured as a specimen. She was very tiny. There were others with her." He looked us over speculatively. "About the size of you, they were," he said. "They died."

"Awk," I said involuntarily. I covered up with a question. "Do you have many specimens from our planet?" I asked.

"No. Just you three. And her."

"What did—I mean, what did the others die of?"

He smiled benignly. "Various things," he said.

"Now, look, Boss—" Cleelock started to get up and remonstrate.

The Boss scowled.

"Sit down!" he said, and Cleelock sat down. More calmly, the Boss went on, "I will tell you a story to quiet your nerves. It begins here on Ganymede, just under a million of your years ago."

"I don't want a story," Cleelock protested. "I want—"

"I don't care what you want," the Boss said mildly but finally. "This story is about solitary confinement. Not one man in solitary confinement, though. A whole race."

Cleelock said, "How can a race be solitary, Boss?"

The Boss glared. "All right," he said angrily, "I won't tell you; I was against it anyhow."

Cleelock pulled in his horns. "Wait a minute, Boss. Let's—let's hear the story. Before you—test us, I mean."

The Boss shook his head. He pointed to the door. "Too late," he said ominously. "The examiners are ready."

We looked apprehensively at the door.

Three pinkies were coming in, each with a shaggy beast on a leash to keep him company. The foremost of them was struggling under a clumsy object that looked a little like an electric chair. He set it down, fussed with some gadgets on the back of it and looked at me expectantly. He sang a little song of invitation.

"All right," said the Boss—but to my relief, he was talking to Cleelock instead of me. "Sit down."

Cleelock dazedly stumbled over to the chair and sat, not with any appearance of comfort.

The Boss called something musical; the pinky by the chair touched something among the gadgets; there was a quick crackle of energy.

Cleelock's body became completely transparent. "Hey!" he squawked. "What's going on?"

"Oh, Tommy," I said. "You look funny. I can see right through you."

"Well, I can't see a thing." He was peering frantically around the room, his eyes like a blind man's. "Everything's all out of focus, like. What is this?"

"Your cornea doesn't refract," I started to say learnedly—but by the time I got the words out it didn't matter. The pinkies had conferred briefly in musical sounds, and the sound of energy died. Cleelock's body once more became opaque, and his naked skeleton was clothed with flesh.

"Take it away," he moaned. "I'll be good."

The Boss was gesturing to me and, there being no help for it, I took my place in the hot seat. When the juice came on it didn't fry me, as I had expected. In fact there was no sensation at all, except the peculiar inability to focus my vision that had troubled Cleelock. Everything ran lumpily together, and nothing looked like anything at all. Involuntarily I closed my eyes to shut out the sight. That was a gross error. It's bad enough seeing chaos with the eyes open. When your eyelids have become transparent, and you can feel them pressed tightly shut, and still you see a maelstrom of light and color, then it is bad.

But it didn't last. A few seconds, and I was replaced by Duncan. And a few more seconds and we were all through.

The Boss was talking things over with the three other pinkies. Then he turned to us, his face registering dissatisfaction.

"How'd we come out, Boss?" I asked hopefully.

"Hah," he said darkly. "No good."

"No good?"

"No. You are too old; we cannot give you the treatment. That means only one thing," he added, scowling darkly. "There must be purification!" And he pointed to the door with a theatrical gesture.

WE TROOPED out as he directed, back to the elevator. Inside he pressed another of the buttons, and the door closed and opened as before. "What do you make of this 'purification' business?" whispered Cleelock. "Sounds bad to me."

But before I could answer the door was open again, and bright sunlight was streaming in.

We looked out onto what seemed to be a roof garden. I gathered, from our position about forty feet from the edge of it, that it was no small roof, either. To judge by the way the horizon looked we were a good thousand feet in the air.

We were standing on a path made of translucent, reddish stone. All about us grew bushes and trees.

"Come along," said the Boss, mildly enough, and pointed to a pond. We walked ahead of him, and I stared down into it.

Whatever it was, it wasn't water. It was the same stuff I had seen in the fountain back on the ship—a livid orange liquid with all the appearance of fire. A still, limpid flame, so vivid that I expected heat and was surprised when there was none.

"Whaddya know," exclaimed Cleelock. "A fishpond of Martinis!"

The Boss marched up beside us and, benignly resting a hand on the sloping shoulder of his faithful beast, addressed us.

"Jump in," he said.

"What?"

Pettishly, "Jump in!"

Cleelock said determinedly, "No. Look, Boss, that stuff's dangerous. How do we know what it is? Maybe it's acid."

The little ridges of muscle where the Boss' eyebrows should have been went up. "You refuse to jump?" he asked incredulously.

"Well, yes." Cleelock stood his ground.

The Boss turned to me. "Jump in!"

"I'd—I'd rather not."

And Duncan chimed in, "Me too. I don't see the sense in it."

The girl, who had been watching us wide-eyed, sang something questioning and rapid to the Boss, who gave her a quick arpeggio in return. To us he said, "You don't have any choice, you specimens; you must go in the pool. It is for the purification. Besides, I tell you to!"

"Huh-uh." Cleelock shook his head vigorously, Duncan and I backing him up. "Be reasonable, Boss. That stuff looks kind of deadly."

I expected the Boss to tear into a

tantrum but he merely glowered indecisively for a moment, then ripped off a many-noted bugle call in the general direction of the bushes. There was a moment of waiting, then half a dozen pinkies appeared. The Boss, scowling at us, sang them a catchy little air that boded us no good.

Like football players getting ready for a line buck, they formed a wedge and advanced on us, edging us closer to the pool.

"Wait a minute," Duncan begged. "Look, Boss, we're the specimens you like. Remember? We don't eat much."

"In the pool," snarled the Boss. "Jump!"

The three of us were huddled together, giving ground slowly and unwillingly. Cleelock, next to me, swore under his breath. "Okay, Nick," he whispered. "He's asking for it. When I jump for the Boss, you grab the girl. Duncan—you take one of the others. Any one. Got it?"

"Huh?" I asked stupidly, but I felt his hand prodding something into mind. It was flat and coldly metallic, and I found out—the hard way—that it had a sharp edge. It was one of the knives they'd given us to eat with! Cleelock had been smarter than either Duncan or me—he'd thought to snatch the knives for a future emergency!

"Jump!" the Boss said coldly again, and the other pinkies came on toward us. We retreated until there was nothing behind us but pool. Then—

"Now!" roared Cleelock, and sprang for the Boss. A split second behind him, I grabbed the girl, held the knife to her flimsily covered torso. She shrieked a terrified coloratura aria, the Boss squawked in surprise and Cleelock bellowed: "Now we'll see who's running things! Boss, call off your dogs—or we'll puncture your gizzard!"

THE PINKIES froze in consternation. For a moment it looked as though we had the situation well under control, but it didn't last. The Boss frothed:

"You foolish men! There are too

many of us—you must go in the pool!" And he shrieked something in their polytonal tongue, and the other pinkies came on.

Cleelock wavered and Duncan and I watched him for our cue. Then he cursed furiously and threw down his knife. "Hit that line!" he bellowed, and lunged into the knot of pinkies.

Duncan and I piled into them after him. It could have been slaughter if we had used the knives, but we didn't have to. Their childlike, light-gravity bodies were like straws in our way.

We hurled them aside, boiled through and bounded for the elevator cage, Cleelock showing the way. Surprise and the simple business of picking themselves up from where we'd thrown them kept the pinkies a reasonable distance behind us, and Cleelock had time to fumble around with the buttons. He chose one at random, poked it...

It worked! The door slid shut. There was a brief pause; it opened again. No jolt, no lurch, no jar... but we were no longer on the roof. We were looking out into a pitch-black corridor.

Cleelock poked his head out tentatively. Nothing happened; we all stepped out, looked up and down. Utter blackness, not a fleck of light anywhere, except what came from the elevator itself.

"Now what?" whispered Duncan.

"It beats me," I said. "Maybe this is the cellar." The car was as dark as your alimentary canal. There was nothing to show that anyone had ever been there—in fact, I realized suddenly, there wasn't even the racket of their clashing air-conditioning pumps.

"Spooky," I whispered. "Let's go someplace else."

Well, it was the wrong thing to do, on the face of it. The darker and the deserted, the better a place was for our purposes. But there was something so lonesome and desolate about that corridor that we didn't stop to think things over. We piled back into the car and turned to Cleelock, and Cleelock turned to the board of buttons. He reached up for

the handiest one. The door slid closed, and we braced ourselves to see what floor we'd land on this time. The door opened.

Sunlight poured in.

"Holy heaven!" gasped Cleelock. "We're back on the roof!"

One glance convinced me—it was a roof, all right. "Don't just stand there," I begged. "Get us out of here before the pinkies realize we're back!"

Cleelock nodded quickly and stretched out his hand. Just as his finger was settling on a button Duncan stopped him with a quick, incredulous gesture. "Wait a minute," he said. "Take a look around. This isn't the same roof!"

THAT GAVE us to think. I gaped out onto the roof, and what Duncan said was incontrovertibly the truth.

I vividly remembered the other roof. There had been a sort of glassy-pavemented path, and well-kept trees and bushes, and the pond. And most of all, there had been the pinkies. Here there were none of those things. Here there were only a few patches of scraggly grass. And the edge of the roof was much nearer, because this roof was not very large.

Cleelock spat angrily. "Characters," he said. "They build houses with two roofs."

Duncan said wonderingly, "That other roof—could we have been mistaken? Was it just a terrace, maybe? A gallery sticking out from one of the lower floors?"

Cleelock snorted. "And the rest of the building invisible, huh? Did you see any higher stories—or do you see any now?"

"Well, no. But, Tommy—"

"But Tommy nothing! Terrace, the man says. How could it be a terrace?"

"All right, Steinmetz. What was it? Two roofs, like you said?"

Cleelock's truculence puffed away. "Search me," he said weakly; "all I know is, I am not happy."

I could see the other buildings about us. They were tall towers and spires, not like the cubes I remembered seeing as we approached the

city. Then I had an idea. I said, "Let's settle the argument. If it was a terrace, we'll be able to see it over the side of the roof. Why not take a look?"

"Why not?" echoed Duncan. The three of us headed for the edge... cautiously, because the architect of this edifice had neglected to include a guard rail in his plans. We peered down, afflicted with severe vertigo.

No terrace. In fact, nothing at all. Nothing but a straight, sheer breath-taking drop that looked to be a thousand light-years, and must in fact have been at least a mile.

The three of us recoiled from that murderous brink and stood still yards away, quieting our shattered nerves. "What a dope," moaned Cleelock. "You still want to look for that terrace? Maybe it's on the other side."

"No," said Duncan, and there was a definite note of strain in his voice.

"No," said Duncan, and there was a definite note of strain in his voice.

"No, it's not on the other side."

I looked at him curiously. "How do you know?"

"Take a look." He waved weakly off into space. "Look beyond that pinkish sort of tower over to the right. Way off on the horizon—see it?"

I peered out over the edge of the room. There was a strong breeze blowing, and it made my eyes water. I had difficulty in focusing, and while I was squinting Cleelock spotted it. "You mean—oh, yeah. It's another city. Looks all cubical, like this one."

"No," said Duncan. "Not like this one. Do you recognize that purple thing between the city and us?"

"Why, no. That is, it does look a little familiar—ulp!"

Cleelock abruptly ran out of words, and just about that time I saw what they were talking about.

There was a cubical kind of city. Before it, made tiny by the distance but still recognizable, was a purple torpedo of a rocket ship. The very rocket in fact, in which we had come.

"But that's impossible," I said reasonably. "That's the city we're in."

4



We stood gaping at that city for quite a while before we could believe it; and then we weren't sure. It was a good fifteen miles from us. Fifteen miles that we had covered apparently, in the time it took for the elevator door

to open and shut. But how?

Cleelock said tentatively, "That elevator must not have been an elevator, I guess."

"Then what was it?"

He shrugged. "I don't know what you'd call it. Maybe a rocket, or a subway, or something; whatever it is, it sure got us from there to here in a hurry."

Duncan said practically, "Well, let's not worry about it. The important thing is, what are we going to do? As I see it we're in a pretty bad jam, and no relief in sight. We're stuck on Ganymede. We've got nothing to eat, no weapons, no friends. The only people we know on the whole planet want to dunk us in what looks like a sulphuric-acid swimming pool."

I said, "We still have our knives; at least, I have mine. Maybe we could catch one of the pinkies, and force him to take us to the rocket, and then—"

Cleelock snorted. "And then what? I left my pilot's license in my other suit."

"That's right," Duncan chimed in. "We can't fly a rocket. Even if we could, there's something else. What's all this talk about forcing a pinky to do anything? We tried that, remember? And look what happened?"

"Well, I guess you're right," I admitted. "They don't seem to mind

the idea of death. The whole thing is screwy." I pondered on the matter for a second. "Maybe it was a bluff," I suggested. "I wondered if the Boss actually thought we would kill him, back there on the other roof. Maybe he thought we were bluffing, and ran a counter-bluff of his own, and it worked."

"I think not," Duncan said meditatively. "He believed us all right. You know, Tommy, the more I think about it, the more I'm struck by something you told us."

Cleelock said, "And what was that?"

"You said the Boss claimed to be a dog. Well—maybe he is."

I said doubtfully, "We've been over this once before. You had the idea that it meant the pinkies weren't the ruling race on this planet—that they were just domestic animals of some kind. But if it isn't them, who is it? Surely we'd expect to see the ruling race of a planet. It can't be the girl—the Boss said she was just a specimen like us, and only one of her at that."

Duncan spread his hands. "I give up," he announced resignedly. "It just doesn't add up. Things check to a certain point. The pinkies think of themselves as pets; they are willing to be killed in order to do their jobs—they even offer themselves as food for us. But right there the proposition collapses. If they don't run this planet, who does?"

"The redhead's pet monster, maybe," Cleelock suggested, and we all laughed grimly.

Duncan stared around us. He said, "We haven't solved the main question. What do we do?"

There was a silence. Then Cleelock said, "I know one thing; we can't just let things ride—we'd starve to death. How about trying out Nick's suggestion?"

"You mean forcing one of the pinkies to take us to the ship?" I asked.

"No. Not one of the pinkies—the girl." He ran an irate hand through his hair. "I don't care what the Boss says—if his race doesn't rule this planet, the girl's must. He can't pass her off as human. You know what

she looked like. Pretty, yes. Human—good Lord, no—not with that hair. But believe me—human or not, there never was a woman that I couldn't order around. Let me handle her—that's all I ask."

Duncan looked at me doubtfully. I said, "What can we lose?"

"All right." He nodded, and turned back to the—well, let's keep calling it an elevator.

The door of the car was closed.

Cleelock tore his hair. "Wouldn't you know it?" he moaned. "Say! Does that mean somebody's using the thing—somebody that might be chasing us with it?"

"Probably," Duncan said in a flat tone. And the expression of despair on his face added the words: *And if so, what can we do about it?*

Cleelock closed his eyes. "Well," he said, and his voice was like a prayer, "there must be some way to open that door. We'd better find it. And when we do, the plan still goes."

But it didn't go, really, because we couldn't open the door.

We hunted high and low on the blank face of it, and found—nothing. Not even a design. Nothing that looked like a button, or a lever, or a switch, or anything else that might help us to get out of there. The plan was a complete flop before it got started.

We gave up, finally, and scouted the rest of the roof. There, too, we drew a complete blank. There was nothing that could help us. The roof was a plain, featureless rectangle, with the boxlike "elevator" cage in the center, grassy turf covering its whole surface and the sheer, frightening drop of a mile on all sides.

Cleelock lying on his belly while Duncan and I sat on his heels reported that he could see no windows over the edge. And, even if he had, we scarcely could have reached them. We had no ladder. The grass could not well have been plaited into a rope, though we thought of it—it was about the consistency of boiled asparagus. I suppose we could have tied our belts together—but what could we have moored them to?

No, there was no way of getting off that roof. And there was also nothing to eat.

We sat in front of the sealed door and waited for something to happen. Duncan said speculatively, "I bet they find us pretty quick. There were only about two hundred buttons in the car. Trial and error will do it."

Hopefully, I put in, "Well, maybe not. Most of the other floors—or whatever you call them—must offer a little more concealment than this one. They'll have to investigate every possibly hiding place, and that might take quite a while."

Duncan said tiredly, "All that means is that we have a chance of starving to death. The hell with it. We're not going anywhere—let's not kid ourselves."

We thought that over for a while in silence. I squinted up at the lavender sky and saw that the sun—small at this distance, but bright—was rapidly approaching the horizon. By the conditioning of long habit, I began to feel sleepy.

"We ought to post a guard and turn in," I suggested.

Cleelock nodded drowsily and Duncan, who was still wide-awake, said, "All right. I'll take the first turn. You can go to sleep any time you like. But—" his eyes went to the edge of the roof, not twenty feet away—"try not to roll out of bed!"

DUNCAN WAS nudging me, and I woke up. It was night, but there were more stars out than I had ever seen. Duncan's face was clearly visible in their light.

I yawned. "Did anything exciting happen?"

He shook his head. "Not a blame thing. Oh, there's something funny way off on the horizon. But it's not very exciting. Just a lot of reddish light—looks like a big fire, maybe."

I stood up and looked where he was pointing. The sky was discolored with savage red, silhouetting the elevator cage. But it was a long way off indeed. "Too far away to bother us," I said. "Okay, you can go to sleep; I'm awake now."

He lay down and I began walking

around, wishing I had a cigarette.

It was becoming very cold indeed on the roof, and I was grateful for my leather flight jacket. I looked around me with some interest. Even though we were in the "We who are about to die—" category, it was still a unique situation, and I was curious about our surroundings.

Overhead, I saw, were the familiar constellations. I picked out the Dipper and the wobbly *W* of Cassiopeia, unchanged by a mere hundred-million-mile shift in parallax. They did seem oddly bright, though nothing else about them was strange. I could see easily the components of the binary in the cup of the dipper, and Arcturus, to the south, was almost too brilliant to look at. The thin atmosphere, I thought.

In the monochromatic starlight the blue of the grass faded out, and the gaily colored towers that were all around us had bleached to a uniform gray. There was not a light in them. No windows, of course; I remembered that there had been no windows. But still, I would have expected some kind of light in a city, even if it were only reflected up from the ground below.

Greatly daring, I crawled on my hands and knees to the edge of the roof and looked down.

I am a phlegmatic type, I think; surely not one of those who suffer from desires to fling themselves off high places. But, looking down into that yawning ebony chasm in that deserted city, I felt the lure of it calling to me. It was so utterly, entirely black. Even the outlines of the adjacent structures faded into an inky pool. So black that it seemed a sort of midnight well, and I had the feeling that I could leap off into that thick, clinging vacuum and swim about in it.

But, fortunately, I didn't try it; I scuttled backward from the edge of the roof and stood up.

Utter blackness. It seemed we were in a ghost city. Not a sound, not a glimmer of light.

I HAD A sudden idea, and peered out toward where I had seen the cube city. It was still there and, sure

enough, as I had expected it shone! There was life in that city, beyond doubt. There were no yellowish dots of luminiscence such as you see in an Earthly skyline, no windows or lighted advertising signs. But a bluish glow pervaded it, outlining its boxlike buildings clearly enough even at fifteen miles' distance.

I had kept my watch running. The time it indicated, set to a time zone on a planet hundreds of millions of miles away, meant nothing at all, but at least it could be used to give me an idea of the passing hours. Two hours of solitary vigil, I decided, would be plenty. Then I would let Cleelock take over.

I leaned against the "elevator" box and allowed myself to drift off into reverie. It was a pleasant feeling... until I caught myself just as I was falling forward onto my face, and knew I had almost been asleep. I roused myself and began walking around again.

The reddish glow was still silhouetting the box, but far brighter than before. Intrigued, I walked around the box.

A glowing semicircle of light burst upon me. The size of a hundred moons, blotched and streaked with red and purplish light.

It was Jupiter!

I stared at it in reverent fascination. A fantastic sight, even by the fantastic standards of the fantastic place we were in. I saw the cloudy areas of its supposed continents and seas far more clearly than I remembered seeing them in the imaginative drawings I had cherished in my youth. So near and so huge—I almost imagined that I could reach out and thrust my fist through it.

"Jupiter," I whispered; "that cinches it." And at once the strangeness of our predicament reached me as it never had before. We were on Ganymede, all right...and a long, long way from home.

I kept my eyes on the tremendous disk, in absorption. By the time the two hours were up the roof was illuminated almost as brightly as by day, with the vast Jovian circle staring down at us over the top of the elevator. Cleelock was stirring

restlessly in the light, and I had no compunctions about waking him.

He stared round-eyed at the planet overhead. "What the devil!" he gasped.

I told him what it was and he nodded, wide-awake. Our voices woke Duncan and the three of us talked excitedly about the magnificent sight, until Duncan's practical mind took us onto a more urgent subject.

"Damn, but I'm hungry," he said ruefully.

That put the quietus on any further talk about abstractions. We were all hungry, and there seemed to be nothing we could do about it. Cleelock ordered, "Forget it. Go back to sleep."

It seemed to be the best advice possible under the circumstances and Duncan and I tried to put it into effect. But we didn't succeed. Because just as we lay down and closed our eyes we heard a surprised yelp from Cleelock and the metallic sound of a door sliding open.

We leaped to our feet. The door to the "elevator" box had opened. And out of it stepped our gorgeous, feather-haired traveling companion and her two-legged pet!

"GRAB HER, Tommy!" I yelled, and Cleelock jumped to do it. The girl's hand went to her mouth in shock and bewilderment, but she put up no resistance at all. After the initial surprise she merely stared at him with resigned loathing. Looking somewhat foolish, he released her arms after a moment and just stood there in an attitude of threat.

Duncan and I closed in on her, me waving my silly little knife. "Perfect!" Cleelock exulted. "We couldn't ask for anything more! The very person we want, and she comes walking into our arms!"

"What'll we do with her?" I asked.

Cleelock hesitated. "Well—make her take us to the ship."

"And how are we going to get that across to her?"

"I'll try," Duncan volunteered. He fixed the girl with his third-degree

stare. "Do you speak English?" he demanded.

She looked at him in wondering silence.

"I said, do you speak English?" he repeated. "*Parlez-vous français? Panymayoo parusski? Parlate italiano? Sprechen sie Deutsch? Se habla*—I mean, *habla Espanol?*"

She frowned uncertainly, then essayed a peal of music.

Cleelock said, "Look, linguist, quit wasting time. Suppose she did speak one of those languages. What good would it do us? We don't."

Duncan shrugged uncomfortably. "Let me try again," he begged. He snapped his fingers to focus her attention, then made an effort at sign language. He pointed to the elevator door, then down, then to us, then up into the sky with a broad, sweeping motion. The girl gaped at him in bewilderment.

"You're doing fine," Cleelock said in disgust. "How do you expect her to figure that one out? I *know* what you're driving at, and even so those handies of yours confuse me." He scratched his head thoughtfully. "This palaver isn't getting us anywhere at all," he said. "Let's try direct action."

"Sure," Duncan said. "How?"

"We'll drag her into the elevator. Maybe she'll get the idea. If she doesn't, all right—we'll just keep pushing buttons till we get to where we want to go. And let's step on it—before somebody else decides to use the car again."

"Okay," I said—it was as good an idea as any. "What about the dog?"

"We'll leave that here," said Cleelock, the masterful. "Let me show you how."

HE ATTRACTED the girl's attention and pointed to the collar around her neck, gesturing her to take it off. She gazed wide-eyed, uncomprehending. He touched the dog-like beast, pointed to its collar, ran his finger along the leash to her own, repeated the take-off gesture.

Then she got it. She stumbled back in sheer horror. I cannot think of any obscene or menacing gesture he could have made that would have

sparked a more horrified response in an Earthgirl. The red-head's eyes were wide with fright and revulsion.

"Oh, Lord," groaned Cleelock. "Now what's the matter?" Impulsively, he grabbed the leash and yanked at it.

That did it. She shrieked in terror—which, incidentally, tore my heart out with compassion—and her hands flew helplessly to her throat. There was a *click* and the collar came off in her hands. She set it gently down on the ground, touched the beast in farewell, and waited for the worst.

"You see" bragged Cleelock, grinning broadly. "Now we can get going! Come on, you—" he prodded the girl toward the cab—"let's make haste while Jupiter shines!"

She went without resistance, and the three of us followed close behind. When we were inside she looked up and saw the beast had been deserted, gazing after us with dimmed, mindless eyes. As she watched it looked away and, like a grazing sheep, began drifting over toward the edge of the building. Then she went wild.

"Hold onto her, Nick!" Cleelock yelled. "Don't let her out."

I had her—but she was a terrific, squirming handful. "She's afraid her pal will fall off the roof," I panted.

"Never mind that," Cleelock ordered. "We can't worry about him. Hang on." He stared at the array of buttons, reached up and touched one.

Just as his finger came to rest on it the girl gave a squawk like a steam calliope and broke loose; she lunged out of the door.

"Hey!" I yelled, and jumped after her. I brought her down with a flying tackle, but she wriggled free like a greased dolphin and chased after the animal, now perilously close to the unfenced edge of the roof.

I saw that she caught it and led it to safety. But it didn't matter particularly to me at that time.

Because, glancing over my shoulder, I also saw that the door to the elevator-thing had closed once more. And my friends, no doubt, were back in the other city, feeling as foolish, and lost, and worried as I was myself.

5



THE red-head came ambling back to me, smiling happily, the silver collar of the dog's leash pressed lovingly to her throat. She didn't appear to resent the rough handling I'd given her at all.

I got up and brushed

at the bluish grass stains on my legs. Candidly, I was worried. It had been bad enough with Cleelock and Duncan to share my misery, but with them gone off to heaven-knows-where it was far worse. Still...this was a remarkably pretty girl, I told myself, and the situation did have some attractive angles. In the ruby light from Jupiter, overhead the flaming crimson of her hair washed out, and she might have been an exceptionally fine-haired Terrestrial blonde.

She grinned at me in a friendly fashion and sang a questioning phrase.

"It beats me, honey," I told her. "Try singing it as a polka."

She looked at me blankly. I pointed to the closed door. "Open," I ordered, without much hope.

Another peal of music.

"I said *open*," I repeated. I remembered the knife and held it before me, pointed at her as menacingly as I could manage. "Open that door!"

No music this time. Instead, she laughed at me with broad good humor. When she was quite through laughing she reached out and plucked the knife from my incredulous fingers. She stared at it for a second, then negligently tossed it

up and away. It sailed through the air, and dropped out of sight into the chasm beyond the edge of the roof. She watched it gravely, then turned and gave me another home-folks smile.

"Well, I looked good on that one, I must say," I said bitterly. "All right, pal. Now what shall we do?"

She patted my shoulder comfortingly. Then she handed me the silver collar.

I stood, holding it in my hand. It tingled oddly, almost as though charged with a minute electric current. I started to hand it back to her, a little nervously, but she halted me. She gestured the act of holding the thing to my throat, as she herself had been doing before.

"Huh?" I said.

A peal of peremptory music. She frowned and repeated the gesture.

"Oh, lady," I said, "I haven't got time for games. I've got a lot of worrying to catch up on." I handed the collar back to her and walked over to the closed door of the *soi-disant* elevator. I was running my hands over it for the twentieth hopeless time when she tapped me on the shoulder.

I turned. She was holding the collar out to me again, a beseeching, lost look in her eyes.

I began to lose my patience. "Good Lord," I said in exasperation. "Leave me alone." I walked away to stare off into the red-lit night at the distant city of cubes.

The black chasm, now shot through with a dull, mean-looking red, was below me. I looked into it—from a safe distance—with a sort of grim enjoyment. At least, I thought, I could always jump...

A gentle peal of music from behind me. I leaped a foot—away from the edge of the building.

She was holding the collar out to me again. I thought of a line from my high-school Shakespeare. Something about, "thrice offering a kingly crown, which he did thrice refuse."

"Honey, don't sneak up behind me like that," I said.

She smiled forgivingly. Then, still smiling, she walked toward me, her

arms outstretched to me. It was a strange time for romance, I thought...

But she stepped up close to me, until her small, pointed chin was only an inch from my breastbone. Her arms went about my neck. It took me a split fraction of a second to make up my mind what she was after, and that was entirely too much time.

My subconscious woke up and began squawking, *Danger!* But it was too late. I felt something chill and metallic circle my neck. There was an instant of numbing electrical shock; I heard the *click* as she fastened the catch....

And the collar was locked about my neck.

SOMEONE WAS speaking to me, not in words.

It was not a voice, but I understood it. It was not my own thoughts, but it was in my brain.

It was a thought, an emotion, and a mood. It was three things—or more than three things—expressed at once, yet each standing alone. There was a command of non-fear; a broad soundless laughter; a memory of my amusing obstinacy.

In English, it might have been said like this: *Do not be afraid, Earthman. You struggled very hard, but—laughter—the struggle is over.*

I stared incredulously at the girl. She was watching me with amusement on her delicately shaped face, but surely it was not her thoughts that were invading my mind. "Who—who are you?" I said aloud.

Again that echoing laughter. Then suddenly a picture was in my mind, so vivid that it blotted out what my eyes were seeing and replaced the view with a vision of... of the pallid, deformed, doglike thing to which I was leashed, in all its idiot hideousness!

I said feebly, "No. Oh, no!"

That is what I am, said the soundless voice in my brain, with sadness and humorous resignation woven into the meaning of the thought. *That is what my people have been for a million years.*

What happened then is an inglo-

rious episode in my career, and I had rather not dwell on it. I was panic-stricken. Things were just suddenly too much for me...and I rebelled.

I clawed at the collar around my neck, fumbling for a catch that I couldn't find. I'm not sure, but I think that I must have been screaming. My fright awoke a responsive alarm in the mind that was within my mind, and I sensed that, for an infinitesimal second, it drew away in doubt.

Then...it returned, warm, strong, reassuring. *Sleep, Earthman*, said the voice in my mind with gentle solicitude. *Sleep—*

I slept.

THERE WERE chaotic dreams of things beyond my understanding, and a feeling of receiving instruction from a master. Then I was awake.

It wasn't a real sleep, I suppose. I don't think it could have lasted more than a moment, because when I opened my eyes there was no waking-up drowsiness, and I saw that the girl was standing just as she had stood before, watching me expectantly.

"Is it over?" she asked.

I nodded, and started to reply, "Yes." But I did a rapid double-take which left me goggling at her. Her voice had been the peal of music—yet I had understood what she said:

She saw my confusion and, understanding, laughed. "I see that it is over," she said in that strange music, answering her own question. "How do you feel? Can you understand me?"

I nodded speechlessly.

"Then tell me how you feel," she demanded. "If you can understand, you can talk."

Well, that made sense, of course. But nevertheless, it was absurd. I tried, unbelievably, to speak. And, though I could not have said how it happened, a musical phrase came to my mind, and I uttered it, and knew that it meant: "I feel fine!"

But it was a lie. I was dizzy, and bewildered beyond endurance.

I sat limply on the sparse blue

grass. The movement tugged the leash about my neck, and the dog-beast—the thing that just had been inside my mind—croaked protestingly, then slid to its knees with a jolt and stared brainlessly around.

The girl said, "Here—let me take the collar off. He has withdrawn rapport. It is so difficult, the first time. It tires him, and it is bad for you."

I let her lean, strong fingers touch something in the collar. It fell into jointed halves, and she held it in her hand. She was smiling at me.

"Tell me what this is all about," I begged her.

She hesitated, and then she began to tell me.

I was in a plastic, credulous mood, and if what she said had been obvious fabrication I would have believed it anyway, for lack of the will to doubt. But it was clearly, fantastically the truth.

"First," she said, "you are in no danger. There was some danger but it has passed. There was the danger that your mind would not survive the contact with the mind of the Khreen."

"Khreen?" It was a warbling, ascending-musical note, the same word the Boss had used back in the rocket. I waved at the drowsing beast. "Do you mean *that*?"

"Yes," she said. She looked at the animal, and in her look I saw both tenderness and genuine respect. Respect for that hunk of low-grade beast!

"Explain this to me," I begged.

SHE TOUCHED the beast fondly. "A million years ago," she said, "Ganymede was a civilized world. Its people were humanoid—more like myself, I think, than like you. And they were advanced in science, as you can see." She hesitated, then went on, and by and by I began to understand. There was a reason why that hulk of an animal could command respect and affection from as brilliant a girl as she. For it was a beast, all right...but it was also the finest mind the universe had ever spawned!

"Perhaps," she said, "their sci-

ence was too far advanced. They knew ways of changing the stuff of life itself—radiations, surgical techniques, things I cannot understand. And through that came their great catastrophe."

The Khreen, as I learned to call them, had grown and matured, covering their own planet with their works and sending scouts to every planet of the system. But they had found—nothing. Half the worlds were bleak ice; some were roaring inferno. Two—Earth and Venus—showed life, but nothing that could be called intelligence.

Thwarted in the search for another race's companionship, they returned to their own world, determined to create an intelligent race! One by one they examined and tested the life-forms of their planet, and one by one they were discarded. Until they came to a small-brained amphibian, rust-colored and few in numbers, that lived in their swamps. It was the thing they sought, far enough along the road of evolution to be of value, and yet it had not specialized.

They took that little rust-colored reptile from the swamps and put it in their laboratories. They charted a path for its evolution to follow, and started it on the way with their miraculous rays.

Then, something went wrong.

"It seemed to be a self-sustaining reaction," the girl said slowly. "I—I'm not sure exactly what happened, because the knowledge of it was lost in the upheaval that followed, and I probably could not understand anyhow. But the rays went wild. And all over Ganymede, evolution was uncontrolled."

I took in the meaning of her words slowly. It was a horrible vision that they conjured up. As she spoke, I imagined free mutation of species, monsters being born.

It had not lasted long, she told me, but in the brief time that the rays were loose in the world, it destroyed their status quo. In effect, a sentence of execution had been passed on every person and every beast that was alive on Ganymede, and it was only a matter of waiting

until the corpses cooled. For slow, horrible radiation burns destroyed them.

Within a year the only living things were the new-born...and they were monstrous.

"Every species threw off mutants," she said. "Uncounted hundreds of thousands of them. Some had many heads, or no limbs at all; some had rubbery skeletons, some were born insane, lived insane, died insane. Some were sterile, and they died. Some were just never meant to live...and they died. Of all the thousands of new types that the rays spawned, only two found mates, and bred true, and survived. One was the Khreen—" she patted the dog-beast. "The other was what you call the pinkies—the descendants of the little red reptile that started the whole thing."

I shook my head wonderingly. Then, as I remembered something, I said, "The Boss was telling me something like this once. He started to tell about a race that was in solitary confinement for a million years. I didn't understand at the time, and I don't now. Is this what he was talking about?"

She nodded. "That was the horror of the whole thing," she said seriously. "For the Khreen came to look like animals, but they were not animals. They survived the rays—but their tragedy was almost worse than if they had become extinct."

I stared incredulously at the dog-beast. "You say this isn't an animal? Well, it would have fooled me. Did—did the rays work in reverse, maybe—making it an atavism or something?"

"No," she said. "The rays did their work, only too well. The Khreen evolved far beyond humanity. What you see before you is *superman*."

I laughed tentatively. "Sure," I said, going along with the gag. "I can tell that just by looking."

"Really," she said, and I saw that she was not joking. "The Khreen evolved, but in an unfortunate direction. The brain of the Khreen became a marvelous instrument for pure thought. The body—evolved too. You know that, even in your

own body and mine, some of the work of directing your actions is done by what you call reflexes?"

"Yes."

"And that these reflexes are not in the brain, but in a group of nerves in your spinal column?"

"I'd heard that," I admitted.

She nodded decisively. "Well, in the evolved body of the Khreen, the work of that group of motor-nerves was increased sharply. In fact—it took over every physical function. The nerves which led to the brain itself atrophied and disappeared. The body became independent, with its own tiny 'brain', a separate nerve system, complete control of its musculature. The brain and the body became separate individuals...and the result was a godlike mind, in the body of a beast!"

"Good Lord," I said.

I LAY BACK, staring up at the round face of Jupiter overhead, thinking it over. Questions flooded into my brain—too many for me to ask even one, because each question was driven out by a dozen new ones before I could get it to my lips. I felt benumbed and bewildered...and a physical thing, forcing itself to my consciousness, was demanding more and more attention. I was hungry.

I stood up, and I felt faint. Small wonder—since the pinkies had awakened us in the space ship, I had had but two meals!

The girl saw me reeling. "What is the matter?" she asked in musical alarm.

"Nothing much," I said apologetically. "I'm just hungry."

"Hungry? Oh." She frowned at me in concentration. "We—we don't eat, here," she said finally. "Still, I suppose—"

"Don't eat?" I yelped. "How do you survive?"

"Why, we use the life-waters," she said, surprised. "Your food does nothing but supply you with energy and materials to replace wastage. The life-waters do the same thing. Only much more simply—by absorption through the skin—and without the contamination in ordinary food.

Also, they have a germicidal effect," she added delicately. "I understand your system is flooded with germs."

"Life-waters," I said, rolling the sound of it on my tongue. "Well, all right. Where do we go to find these life-waters?"

"On the roof of the Entrance Building, for one place." She gestured back to the cubical city. "Where you and your friends got so—ah—excited."

"Let's go," I said, "I'm game."

SHE WAVED her hand before the blank face of the "elevator" door—only she told me, when I asked her, that it was not an elevator but a matter transmitter. The door opened. No buttons, no nothing... it was some sort of electronic capacitance control, I suppose. Inside, with me and the Khreen crowding after her, she pressed a button and the door closed, opened, and we were back on the other roof again.

"Very clever piece of equipment," I said, staggering slightly in dizziness. Then, remembering, "By the way, you haven't told me how I learned to speak your language."

"The Khreen taught you, of course. Telepathically, while you were wearing the collar. That's all the collar is—a telepathy-wave amplifier, and the wire is a conducting cable."

I started to ask more questions, but, "Later," she said firmly. "First get in the pool."

I looked around with a slight, involuntary shiver. There was no one else on the roof, just the two of us—and the Khreen. The pool, there before me, was just as I remembered it...limpid orange flame.

"Go ahead," she said. "It won't hurt you."

I hesitated. "All right. Shall I dive in with my clothes on?"

"Of course not! Take them off."

"Then turn your back," I said. "On that I insist."

The shrug of her shoulders denoted complete lack of comprehension, but, after giving me a wondering gaze, she complied. "How long must I stand like this?" she asked plaintively.

"I'll tell you when to turn around," I said...

It took me several seconds to get up my nerve, but finally I jumped.

The liquid was warm...that was my first impression. Other than that, it felt like nothing at all, except plain water. I was a little disappointed.

It was curiously soothing, though. I lay back in it, relaxed and floating, and new strength seeped back into me. I felt warm, sheltered, comfortable. Almost I could have drifted off to sleep...

"Can I turn around yet?" the girl demanded.

I blinked and splashed myself to a standing position. "Nope! But tell me, how long to stay in this?"

She said, "As long as you like. You've been in it long enough for about three days, though—you might as well come out."

Obediently I crawled out, scraped the golden, fiery drops off me with the flat of my hand, climbed back into my clothing. I felt like a new man.

I looked at her with revived appreciation. "Say," I asked, "have you got a name?"

"A name?" Puzzlement in the musical voice. "No."

"Then I'll give you one," I decided. "I think I'll call you—Honey."

She repeated the English word. Her attempts were amusing, but I had another question on my mind and couldn't take time to laugh at her.

"You forgot to tell me your own story," I reminded her. "What about it?"

SHE TURNED around and looked at me. She said, "I don't know my story. Only what the pinkies have told me. You see, I was very young when I came here."

"From Earth?"

She nodded. "The first expedition. The one that brought you back was the second. They found me and my parents, and took us here—for curiosities mostly, I think, but also to use in their laboratories."

I grimaced. "That doesn't sound

very good," I observed. "You mean, to cut up?"

"Oh, no. The Khreen are still trying to control the evolutionary rays. They could do nothing with my parents, because they were mature, fully formed. On myself, they say, they had limited success." She touched her corona of pinkish, feather-light hair. "You are too old too," she added, smiling elfinly; "they were so disappointed!"

"Yeah, but what about your parents? What happened to them?"

"They died," she said sadly. "When I was very young. Oh, it was not the fault of the Khreen. They were sick when they were found, and they could not be saved."

I nodded. It checked well enough, and I was relieved to find that, after all, she at least had once been human. I wanted her to be human...

But I had one more question. "You said the Khreen were in solitary confinement, didn't you? What did you mean?"

She said, "Oh, that is over now. But for almost a million years, they neither saw, nor heard, nor felt anything. They were telepathic among themselves, and they could communicate mind to mind. But you see, on the whole planet there was no other mind at all that they could reach?"

"Not even the pinkies?"

"Not at first. After a long, long time the pinkies began to have intelligence. The rays gave them a good start, but it was not quite enough. It took almost a million years until their brains were fully enough developed to receive the thoughts of the Khreen. Even today, it is not perfect. That is why they—and we—use these." She touched the silver collar of the beast, which was apparently asleep on the ground beside us.

"But once the pinkies had attained intelligence," she went on, "it was simple. Contact was still very incomplete, but some of the pinkies turned out to be sensitives, and the Khreen began to suggest things to their minds. The first step—" she smiled at the thought—"was to persuade them to domesticate the Khreen!"

"You mean, use them for something?"

"Yes. As beasts of burden. It didn't harm the minds of the Khreen, of course—they could feel nothing. And it kept the two races together, until the Khreen had time to teach them something of science, and develop the thought-collar for better control. They were helped a lot by the fact that their cities still stood, and some of their tools were still in them."

I looked around me. "Is this one of them?"

Her face registered faint revulsion. "No. This is what the pinkies built for themselves. So ugly! But the other city—where we were just now—that is one of the old ones. Much more beautiful. I go there often."

She stopped talking, and I began to pace around, digesting her information. It was hard to believe, but it had to be true. Everything fitted. Nothing that would fit the facts could be any less fantastic.

I spotted Cleelock's discarded knife where he had thrown it, and idly picked it up. Then I had an idea.

"Say," I said, "why couldn't the Khreen use this telepathy gadget on their own brains? Not the real brains—the others, the ones that control the bodies?"

She shook her head. "Telepathy," she reminded me, "can only occur between two full-fledged mature minds. The body brains are very rudimentary, really. They hope, perhaps some day, to evolve a little farther...but they were afraid to take the chance on another catastrophe like the one before. However, they do perform experiments—such as the one on me."

I was about to speak, but something halted me. Something that was prodding at my brain—as though someone were shouting at me, urgently, soundlessly, a long way off.

I turned to the girl, and she had felt it too. Her eyes went wide with self-reproach.

"The Khreen!" she gasped. "I've been out of rapport—"

She clutched at the collar of the neglected genius-beast—still asleep,

to all external appearances—beside her. She snapped it around her neck, close to the medulla oblongata, I realized, and began "talking" to the alert mind within the sleeping beast. I saw an expression of surprise and alarm cross her face, and she stared at me almost with hostility.

"What's the matter?" I asked anxiously.

She frowned in agitation. "Your friends are in trouble!" she said. "They've managed, somehow, to get into the rocketship. They've closed the ports—and they're trying to take off!"

"The fools!" I groaned. "They can't possibly fly it; they'll be killed!"

"Of course," she said soberly. "But that's not the worst. One of the Khreen is trapped inside!"

6



We were back in the "elevator" in a fraction of a moment, all three of us. Before I had a chance to collect my thoughts the door was open again, and we were back in the corridor on the ground floor.

As before, the canoe-shaped car was waiting for us, with a pinky in it at the controls. He was working up a fit of fury, and when he saw me it exploded. "Savages! Cannibals! Murderers!" he yelled, and by the tone, even more than by the fact that he spoke in English, I knew him as the Boss.

"Quiet down," I advised him, speaking in the musical tongue so that the girl could understand. "I didn't do anything."

"Hah!" he said bitterly. "You are all alike, you specimens. Fiends!"

"Leave us not call names, Boss." I begged. "All they're trying to do is get away from here; you can't blame them for that."

"Yes I can!"

"Well, it's your own fault," I said wearily. "You scared us half to death, you and your bad manners. What happened?"

"Bad things happened! The two fiends came out of that building over there—" he pointed with his webbed paw. "One of us saw them, but by the time he was able to get a car to chase them, they were halfway to the ship, jumping along like anything. Great big fiends!"

"Well, let's get out there," I said. "Maybe I can talk sense into their heads. Though, heaven knows, you've made it a tough job."

He snarled at me. "Get in," he said sourly.

We did, and he played with the board in front of him. The car zoomed ahead, swerved in a racing turn and scooted for the purple rocket.

"What's the score?" I yelled to the girl over the noise of the wind rushing past. "Can they see us coming?"

She shook her head. "There's no way of contacting them from outside."

"Great!" I said in surprise and chagrin. "Then what's the sense of coming out here?"

She explained hastily, "I mean, as long as we're on the ground. There is one way you can attract their attention. You'll have to climb up the nose of the ship to where the piloting compartment is—the Khreen who's trapped inside thinks that that's where they are, according to the telepathic messages he sent to my Khreen. Once you're up there, they'll be able to see you through the nose of the ship. There's a port that will open when they release it from inside—" She described the port to me.

I said, "Well, it sounds easy enough. What's the catch?"

She looked at me with sorrow and a trace of fear—not fear for herself,

I thought exultantly, but for me. "The catch is that they are trying to get the ship started. And if they do—"

She bit her lip and didn't finish the sentence.

She didn't have to. I swallowed with some difficulty. "I see what you mean," I said. "If they win, I lose."

THE BOSS brought the car to a stop that would have taken a quarter of an inch of rubber off the tires, if it had had rubber tires. We were under the looming nose of the ship.

The girl pointed, and I recognized the bulging glassy panel behind which lay the pilot chamber. There were metal hoops and projections spotted all over the hull, apparently to help maintenance crews. It wouldn't be very difficult to climb, in this light gravity.

I grabbed the first hoop and started lifting myself.

The girl spoke from behind me, her voice gentle. "Nick—" she pronounced it *Neek*. "Wait a moment, *Neek*."

I turned and let myself down again. She was out of the car, standing close with an expectant look on her face, arms half stretched out to me. She appeared exactly like a girl who wanted to be kissed. I kissed her. The appearance was not deceiving.

"*Neek*," she whispered, "please don't get hurt. Please."

I said, with a sort of speech impediment that I'd just picked up, "I'll try. Hey—where are you going?" She had released me, was getting back in the car.

"I must get out of blast range," she said sorrowfully, pointing at the beast in the car. "I can't endanger the Khreen. But please be safe, *Neek*."

I didn't waste time looking after her, but I kept an ear cocked to the dwindling sounds of the car as I began the twenty-foot climb.

It couldn't have taken more than a minute, but it was one of the very longest minutes of my life. I was expecting the worst. Vivid pictures

flashed through my mind of what I would look like if Cleelock and Duncan got the rockets working before I could stop them. There were several possibilities, and I didn't like any of them. The blast of the rockets might get me, in which case I'd be a charred cinder; or if I managed to hold on until the ship attained some altitude and then fell, I'd be a battered pulp. The very best I could hope for, I decided, would be to hang on until they reached outer space...in which case I would become a bloated icicle.

But by the time I had reviewed the chances, I had made it. I was clinging to the edge of the transparent cone at the nose of the ship.

Through the crystal I could see Duncan and Cleelock, furiously, working over the gadgets on the ship's control panel. By the expressions of exasperation and anxiety on their faces, they were exhorting each other to greater speed.

I banged on the window with all my strength. Nothing happened. I might as well have been sledging a bank vault with a marshmallow hammer, for all the noise I made. I yelled, but that was hopeless—they obviously couldn't hear me, because I couldn't hear them. Then I had a brilliant stroke of memory.

Cleelock's knife, which I had picked up on the roof, was still in my pocket. I took it out and hefted it. It was small, but it was made of a heavy metal, and would do the trick. I swung it against the glass.

It wasn't glass, or it would have broken. It didn't break; it gave out a low, bell-like tone, and wasn't even scratched. But inside, they heard it.

They gaped at me as if I'd been an orange-eyed monster with black wings. But finally I got it through their thick skulls that I wanted in, and how they were to accomplish same.

I tumbled inside, breathing hard in relief. "Where'd you come from?" Duncan demanded suspiciously.

"Climbed up the outside," I explained. "Listen, I've been talking to the Khreen—"

Cleelock cut in, "Never mind that!

Do you know how to run one of these things?"

"No, of course not," I said. "But it doesn't matter. I tell you, I've been talking to the Khreen; you haven't got a thing to worry about. They look like beasts, I admit, but actually they're intelligent, and cultured, and—"

Cleelock's jaw was hanging as he stared at me in mixed incredulity and alarm. "Have you gone off your rocker?" he demanded. "Are you talking about those Ganymedan hair-lessees?"

"Sure. I know they don't look like much, but they mean well. They've got two brains, see? And the good brain is terrific, only it doesn't have anything to do with the body."

Duncan said positively, "He's cracked under the strain. Should we tie him up, or something?"

Cleelock shook his head, keeping his eyes on me warily. "He's just excited," he said charitably. "Come on, let's get on with this thing; I want to go home."

They pushed me aside and returned to the instrument board. "Try those," Cleelock suggested, pointing to a bank of red studs on the right. Duncan began jabbing them at random, in a close approach to panic.

"Hold on, fellow," I said. They snarled over their shoulders at me.

"Well," I said, "if you want to be unreasonable." I hefted the butt of the knife in my hand. With my fist closed over it, its mass converted my hand into an effective blackjack.

I selected the proper, non-lethal spot at the back of their skulls. "This hurts me more than it does you," I murmured to their backs, raising my hand for the knock-out tap...

* * *

WELL, THAT was all some time ago. We've been on Ganymede pretty near a year now, and heaven only knows how long the trip out from Earth took—about a year, anyway. The Boss told me once, but he expressed it as a fraction of Jupiter's year, and we all scratched our heads for about an hour trying to remember how long Jupiter's year was. Then we gave up.

We were all lolling around the life-water pool, one morning after *carna* but just before the time to *brust*, and Duncan said, "No matter how you figure it, we've been away close on to two years. I'm beginning to feel a little homesick."

We nodded. "I wonder how the Dodgers are making out," Tommy said. "And the cold war—how do you suppose that's doing?"

"Yeah," Duncan said wistfully, kicking his feet into the pool and spraying orange sparks about. "It would be nice to go back."

I said, "It sure would. For one thing, I'd like to do something about—well, about legalizing—that is, I mean—" I trailed off, pointing to Honey, who was staring dreamily at the lavender sky. Cleelock and Duncan nodded, understanding perfectly. Cleelock said:

"I had a girl myself back in Memphis. Hope she's still there." He looked wistful for a moment. "In fact," he said, "I hope *Memphis* is still there."

Honey took her eyes off the sky and tossed back her gorgeous hair. In sing-song she said, "The Boss is going back to Earth on another sampling expedition soon. If you ask

him, he'll probably bring a couple of extra girls for you."

"Ah!" said Tommy. Then, in English, "Maybe he could do better than that. Maybe he could bring us back to Earth."

Duncan nodded. "Back to Earth. That's where we belong, men. Back to San Diego, and that lovely fog that hangs over it all winter long. Back to Klotchweiler's store, and my old job behind the counter."

"Back," I said, "to work. To getting up when the alarm goes off and fighting my way onto the Sea Beach Express. Back to sinus trouble and the atomic bomb. And hash-house food. And insomnia and water shortages."

"And coal strikes and steel strikes," Tommy supplied, "and phone strikes and train strikes and—"

"And income tax," said Duncan. "Don't forget the income tax. Don't ever forget the income tax."

Tommy stood up and shook his head like a man coming out of a dream. "Leave this planet and go back to Earth," he breathed, and looked at us wide-eyed. "Fellows, who are we *kidding*?"

THE END

ORIGINAL ILLUSTRATIONS — FREE!

The response to our query about paying for letters in the "Down to Earth" department has shown that you, the readers, are largely in favor of this policy. Some, however, suggested that, instead of paying, we offer originals of the artwork appearing in *Future*.

Well, we can do that, too. We want interesting and well-written letters in "Down to Earth", so as an added inducement, we are calling for votes on the letters. The writer of the letter which you, the readers, think the best in this issue will receive an original. While some of the illustrators want their originals back, we will manage to keep enough good ones for the winning letter writers.

—The Editor

COMPLETE NOVELET



the Everlasting ★ EXILES ★


by Wallace
West

Something had gone wrong
—something THE MASTER
could not have planned—
or was it part of the great
plan?

WILLARD H. (for Hamilton) Bentham, III, dozed in his favorite club chair. The day was warm and sunny; more like May than March. Many of the pretties tripping up and down Fifth Avenue had shed their winter coats. He had had an excellent luncheon of chaud-froid guinea hen. Steel was edging upward. Bentham folded well-manicured hands over a budding paunch. He was content.

"Paper, W.H.?"

He opened his eyes grudgingly and accepted an Early Wall Street edition from the leanish, youngish man in the opposing chair. Confound Smithfield! Getting much too talkative. He perked up as the



"There's something wrong
with the stars," she
breathed. "Look!"

other nodded toward a fresh young thing passing the window.

"Neat," he agreed. "Wasn't it Dorothy Parker who said that men seldom jump hurdles for girls who wear girdles?"

"I believe Miss Parker rhymed 'make passes' with 'glasses', W.H."

"Humph! You don't say!" Bentham thumbed angrily through the paper, beginning at the back. He conned the sports and paid tribute to Ally Oop, his favorite cartoon. Although he had no home but the club, he dutifully read an article on how to patch a roof.

On the best spot in the financial section, just as he had ordered it placed, was Merylyn, Cinchfierce, Bentham and Keene's offering of \$200,000,000 Con. Sou. 2 7/8s. Steel was up two points...

"Huh?" He sat up with a jerk. Why on earth had Steel jumped two points at the market opening? It was unheard of, these days when stocks usually proceeded crabwise.

He whipped over to the front page. The answer was there, in 72-point type:

U.S. ARMY ROCKET REACHES
MOON! ATOM BOMB BASE BEING
READYED!

"Thought that would jolt you, W.H.," crowed Smithfield.

"Not at all. Not at all!" He returned the paper without reading the story under the headlines. "Been expecting it to happen. A guided missile base on the Moon makes the nation impregnable. Naturally Steel went up when the news broke...I'm long on a chunk of Steel, you know."

He hated to close his eyes on Smithfield's envy, but he managed it...managed so well that, within minutes, he was guilty of a genteel snore.

And presently Bentham had a dream...

* * *

It seemed that he was in a roofless arena so huge that he could barely make out the rippling frescoes on its walls. It seemed that he was one of thousands of youngsters who perched in serried, silent ranks in

The Hall, listening intently to The Master.

It was night, but no lights burned; none were needed. The entire vault of heaven was a burnished shield. The sky shone, almost as bright as day, it seemed, with countless giant stars which looked close enough to touch with an outstretched pinion.

"Brother fledges..." The Master was so far away that he seemed only a black dot on the dais, but his thought reached all of the listeners clearly, like smoke through wet leaves. "Brother fledges, this is the end...or the beginning. The Council has decided!"

"Thanks to your efforts, we have at last driven The Enemy back within the confines of his own star cluster. Unless we exterminate him at once, we cannot hold him there when he has reorganized his shattered forces. The Council commands, therefore, that we seize this opportunity to beat a retreat."

A keening of protest arose from the astounded warriors.

"I understand your feelings, brothers," the calm thought drifted on. "You see final victory within our grasp. Yet, I assure you, we must not...we dare not...continue this terrible war!"

"Why not, Master? Why not?" Concerted thought-pressure shook The Hall.

"Because, to win this war, we will be forced to employ the methods of mass terror used by The Enemy. If we do this, we inevitably become as The Enemy is...brutal, callous and incapable of further evolution. When equally matched opponents fight to the death, the few survivors always return to barbarism...Always!"

"The Master is correct," the being who had once been Bentham agreed unhappily.

"The best historical example," the thought sighed on, "is Gara, a benevolent republic which once defied Semlii, a ruthless oligarchy. Eventually the Garans triumphed. But so bloodthirsty had they become that they destroyed their beaten enemies to the last individual by sowing Semlii with radioactive dust. Then,

lacking more enemies, the Garans butchered each other in senseless civil war.

"Some of you fledges are thinking," the Master continued, "that the end justifies the means. Our cause is just; we were attacked without provocation. Why not wipe out The Enemy, you demand, since we have power to do so? The Enemy seems unable to become truly civilized. He glories in war; endlessly bent on conquest, he does not hesitate to slaughter innocent civilians to attain his bloody ends."

"He is better off dead, Master!" The thought slashed like a sword.

"Perhaps, Horath, perhaps," The Master sighed, "and, if there were no alternative, we would fight on. We would fight, even though we knew ends never justify means and that we would become as The Enemy is. But another way out has been discovered..."

"Impossible!" A fledge physicist on Bentham's left hurled the concept. "I know what is afoot. The Council's plan will destroy us."

"You may be right, Lilan," The Master agreed sadly. "Yet The Wise Ones feel the risk must be taken. If we succeed, we will retreat so fast and so far that The Enemy cannot follow."

* * *

THE VISION shattered. Bentham awoke to find a club employee shaking his arm. "Excuse me, sir," the fellow murmured. "Your office is calling."

"Tell them..." He wet dry lips. "Tell them I'll call back."

"They say it is urgent, sir... Something about Steel."

"Tell them The Master is speaking!" Bentham went back to sleep.

* * *

"By breaking contact, we save millions of lives," The Master was continuing his thought. "Also we present The Enemy with only two alternatives: Deprived of opportunities for further conquest, his excuse for civilization may collapse into barbarism, or completely destroy itself, as was the case with Gara. On the other hand, the Council hopes...and your colleague, Tani, insists

...that The Enemy may finally evolve into a being worthy to rejoin the Commonwealth.

"Yes, there is danger in this plan," came the thoughtful formulation. "The Enemy has a brilliant collective mind; he may find ways of searching out our hiding place. We must know this in time to prepare new defenses. And, if he should evolve, we must know this too, in order to reestablish contact.

"For these grave reasons I ask those of you who are gathered here to remain behind when the retreat begins. Who amongst you will volunteer to do so?"

"All of us!" Bentham thought he thought... There was no dissent.

"Thank you, Glath." The Master's thought touched him like a benediction. "Here, then, is the plan. Your identities are to be superimposed upon the germ plasm of Enemy captives who will be exchanged before we withdraw. The most delicate probes will fail to discover this superimposition. If need be, your personalities will lie dormant in the subconsciousnesses of your hosts and their descendants for generation after generation..."

"But," came a protest, "this plan presents grave dangers. Some of the captives you mention will have no children. This will be true of each succeeding generation. If our psyches remain dormant, how can we choose the lines of descent most likely to survive?"

"You probably cannot choose. Horath, although this is uncertain. With each generation, fewer of you may survive. Yet you must remain dormant to escape detection. And another thing: Neither the Council nor I can communicate with you. We can only hope that, when a post-hypnotic suggestion automatically 'triggers' your personalities back to wakefulness, some of you may still exist and be able to act in accordance with a second 'trigger' which will be implanted in your minds."

"What are these 'triggers' and when may we expect them?" Horath asked.

"I cannot risk telling you that..."

And now, farewell for the time, my fledges. Your names, and your selfless heroism, will be remembered down the generations. Report to the Science Section for your treatments."

* * *

Glath opened his eyes and stared about a clubroom which, though well-remembered, seemed foreshortened and distorted. The colors were muddy; the light was wrong; creatures hobbling along outside the window revolted him with their pink softness. Then his glance fell on Smithfield. The meaningless kaleidoscope steadied. Smithfield was "right" anywhere!

"Awake, W.H.?" beamed the com-pleat parasite.

"I...uh...was just resting my eyes." He fumbled at the syllables.

"I was wondering if you could tell me what happens to Steel next."

Something cold, cruel and completely unflinching stirred in Glath's bosom. He rose, automatically squaring his shoulders and trying to flatten his stomach muscles. "Sorry, Smithfield, old boy," he said. "I'm no tipster."

"Excuse me, W.H. I didn't mean it that way." Bentham almost staggered from the impact of the flash of hatred which accompanied the calm words. "Say, you've lost weight, haven't you? Never saw you looking so fit."

Careful! Bentham allowed his body to slump a bit. "I try to keep in trim," he conceded with a fatuous smile. "Well... Got to get back to the office for a bit. Be seeing you." He walked away, doing his best to slouch.

SAFE FROM those gimlet eyes, he headed toward Central Park to think over his situation. The outdoor birdcages in the zoo, with their hundreds of inmates shrieking protests against imprisonment, upset him. He almost ran past them, then calmed as he reached the winding paths occupied mainly by strolling lovers and occasional decadent, dirty and impertinent free pigeons.

The "trigger" had been tripped by that newspaper headline, he knew.

But how long had it been since that last meeting with The Master? Hundreds of years...thousands...tens of...? His mind recoiled. He sorted frantically through his host's badly-remembered odds and ends of history. Rome. Greece. Egypt. Perhaps Atlantis... Yes, he must have slept at least ten thousand years... At least!

How many of his fellows had survived thirty thousand generations of war, famine and pestilence? He opened his mind. The chatter of undisciplined human thought hovering above the city deafened him until he managed to tune it out. Then there was nothing... Only a grey swirling.

"Lilan," he called. "Horath!"

No answer, though he concentrated until his brains ached.

At last he broadcast the old Assembly Call.

Long moments passed. Finally there was a stirring...a resurrection...a surge almost of panic:

"Yes, Glath?" The thought, not the syllables, smoked through his mind.

"Tani!" His relief was so great that he had to sit down on a path-side bench. "Where are you, Tani? Where are the others?"

"The others. I don't sense them. I... Let's see... I am... I was playing in...in Brooklyn..."

"Playing?" he fumbled.

"Yes. Your call triggered me awake. I haven't seen the headline you're thinking of. So I was... playing...under the shadow of the Brooklyn Bridge. Are the others still asleep?"

"Asleep...or dead!"

"Dead? Oh no!" Again that blur which hunted at panic.

"What's the matter with you, Tani? You're not thinking like a fledge. We must act if the worst had happened...must work out a plan for immediate joint action. Meet me at..." he fumbled in Bentham's memories... "at the Iridium Room of the St. Regis Hotel at four." He gave the address.

An unseemly tinkle of amusement was his answer. Then: "I'm not... not presentable." Tani continued

but he could not follow. The thought made gibberish.

"Are you attempting to communicate in English?" he snapped. "Don't. It gives me a headache."

"Sorry, Glath. I just can't enter a place such as you visualize."

"Oh...Then I'll meet you at the Brooklyn end of the bridge at four."

"Roger!" The thought broke off in a giggle.

"Roger?" he puzzled. Now what on earth did that alien word mean?

AN HOUR later he stood under the grim abutment, searching for Tani's thought. The stretch of dust, tin cans and other rubbish was vacant except for a group of youngsters playing an equally ragged game of softball.

"Youse duh guy wot's lookin' fer Tani?" A snubnosed waif of thirteen or so had sidled up to him, pulling at a dirty blonde braid.

"Yes. Do you know...such a person?"

"Tani's me, mister." The youngster's freckles twinkled as she grinned and stuck out a paw.

"Oh come now!" He frowned down at her until he, too, found himself smiling. "If Tani has given you a message, here's a dollar for you."

"Gee! T'anks!" She stuffed the bill into a pocket of her jeans, then doubled up with giggles. At the same time she let him into her mind again...or as much mind as a 'teenager's brain could encompass.

"Great galaxies! A girl child!" His was now in panic.

"Uh huh! A kid and a foxy grandpa. Even th' Master would laugh."

"I'm not so old! I...Bentham, rather...is only forty-one."

"Methuselum!" She poked her superior officer in the midriff. "All outa shape, too!" Another attack of the giggles.

"Stop it," he commanded. "Stop that horrible gabbling."

"One of us hasta talk. Duh gang's watchin'; wot'd dey t'ink if we made like dummies?"

"Say goodbye to them, then, and we'll go. We have much to do."

"Go where?" She eyed him shrewdly, dead serious now.

"Why to...uh..." he canvassed the possibilities with growing uneasiness... "to a park maybe...or the movies?"

"Wotcha t'ink we're playin' under duh bridge fer? Ain't no parks in dis neighborhood. As fer duh movies, duh cops would pick yuh up. sure. Dey all knows me...an' dey knows I ain't got no rich uncle, neither."

"What do you suggest, Tani?" The Bentham in him failed to repress a shudder at her grammar, as well as at her sly wisdom.

"How 'bout 'doptin' me?" Her blue eyes shone with a great hope.

"Maybe that's the answer. Let's go talk to your parents."

"Ain't got none; live wit' my aunt." This time she failed to blanket her thoughts and Glath staggered from that blast of childish hatred. In two seconds a living, breathing image of "Aunt Jo" was chiseled into his mind, along with all the minor deviltries she employed to make Tani's life unpleasant. "Stop it! Stop it," he commanded. "You've got to put away childish things, Tani. I know your body is adolescent, but try to behave like a fledge."

"I'm tryin' to," she muttered, scuffing her heels as she preceded him between two rows of grimy tenements. "Still hate her guts, though, duh ol' bag!"

Glath was startled to find himself echoing the girl's sentiments when they finally came upon Aunt Jo in the flesh, cheerfully engaged in beating her grey tomcat with a broom. Somewhere, he thought, Bentham must still be in evidence to evoke such loathing in him.

"Wotcha want?" the hag bleared at him as she barred access to her basement cubicle. And she betrayed her age by adding: "Don't want no swells trailin' my gal home."

Once more Glath felt the situation getting beyond him. Delve as he would into symbiotic memories, he could find no suggestions for dealing with such a creature as stood before him looking like...like...like nothing so much as a rag bag which had rolled in some gutter.

"Why...I..." In desperation he fumbled in his plump wallet and brought forth an engraved card. "I am Willard H. Bentham, third, vice president of Merylyn, Cinchfierce, Bentham and Keene, a New York brokerage firm. I contribute to many charitable works. I have been struck by your niece's evident intelligence and I would like to adopt her, if you consent, of course. I can offer her every advantage...a good education..." His voice trailed off.

Aunt Jo drew herself together with forlorn dignity. She began making tentative swipes with the broom, as though addressing a golf ball. "Charity," she sniffed. "I've never accepted charity and I never will. Education! What good is education to a girl? I never had none and I do all right, thank you. No, Mr. What's your name. My niece can receive ever' advantage right here in our little home!" Drawing the girl to her, she started down the garbage-strewn stairs.

"But Aunt Jo," interposed Tani. "Mr. Bentham wants t' make wot dey calls a settlement on yuh. How much wuz it yuh said, mister? Five grand, wuzn't it...so my aunt can live happily ever after, like in duh movies?"

"Yes." He grasped at the straw she had extended. "There will be a settlement of five thousand dollars on your aunt as soon as the adoption papers can be signed."

"Oh... That's different." The blowsy hag beat her retreat from virtue without the slightest shame. "Come right on downstairs, mister. I'll make some coffee an' den go over an' get Sam Levinson...He's a smart lawyer. Want ever'thing legal, don't we?...Watch that last step. It's a bit wobbly."

She caught at his elbow with her free hand and dragged both him and Tani into her lair.

2

SUCH WAS the power of pelf and prestige that Glath-Bentham managed to install himself and his newly-adopted-scrubbed-

and-clothed daughter in a Waldorf Towers suit without attracting newspaper attention.

"Now," he said, after a waiter had wheeled away the remnants of their dinner, "we have thinking to do."

"Oh, broTHER. You said a mouthful."

"Do you have to use Brooklynese?"

"Sorry. I've been listening to people talk. I'll try to do better. But I'm awful tired. Let's get goin'." She yawned mightily, albeit prettily while he cringed. If she were half a dozen years older, his thoughts ran, he would be intrigued by her lack of polish. But in a child he had saddled himself with... He stopped, ashamed, as she stared at him in glum understanding. He didn't usually think like a cad.

"Since there has been no second 'trigger'," he began hurriedly, covering his confusion by lighting a long cigar. "Since... Hmm! Smoking is a pleasant habit, isn't it...?"

"Come on. Quit stallin', Pop."

"Where was I? Oh. Since the second part of The Master's plan has not been revealed, it must be presumed we are not strong enough to act. Our only course, therefore, is to join in sending out the emergency call. Together, we may extend the range sufficiently to contact other fledges."

For long minutes their joint call went ringing out across half the world. At first there was no answer. Then Glath fancied there came some sort of irritable, unconscious response, such as a sleeping man makes to a fly crawling over his nose.

"Harder!" he snapped at the white-faced girl. "Louder!"

"I can't!" She jumped to her feet in tears. "My head's full o' mush. Please. Can't we rest a while?"

He started to order her back to work but didn't. He, too, was feeling washed out and groggy. Human brains apparently weren't designed to perform such fledged antics as telepathic broadcasting.

"All right," he conceded. "Run along to bed. I'll finish this cigar."

Resisting a strong temptation to

go to sleep himself, he sat owlshly, trying to form some plan of action. He well knew the power that three or more united fledge minds could wield. It had won them many a skirmish with humans in the old days. But what if no third fledge mind existed here? A middle-aged, out-of-condition man and an adolescent... What could they do? He searched in Bentham's briefcase, found a bottle of brandy, poured a stiff drink and gulped it.

Fact is, his thoughts raced on, the very attempt to do anything might be ill-advised. Do we know whether The Master's plan exists after all this time. Do we know whether the human race still retains its cosmic B.O., or whether it has developed sufficiently to be welcomed into the Commonwealth of Stars? He took another drink and walked to the window for a look at those stars, but found them obscured by driving rainclouds.

True, he continued the argument with himself, "that was a nasty experience with Aunt Jo, but she certainly isn't typical of the human race. Take Bentham, now; he isn't really a bad egg, even though he did work that corner in coffee three years ago. Bentham never kicked a dog or refused to give a beggar a dime.

As for the rest of humanity, he must admit he knew very little about its good and bad features. W. H. inhabited the tight little world of his club and also a steel-and-ivory tower with a foundation of Blue Chips and a population of Bulls, Bears, Cats and Dogs. Ask him to weigh the financial soundness of an obscure corporation and he could do it offhand. Ask him to weigh a dream...

He paced the room and finally poured himself a third drink. For all he knew, The Master's plan might have failed or been changed long before this. It was drawn, surely, to cover a few generations or at most a few centuries. But thousands of years had passed since that last meeting in The Hall. Conditions must have altered beyond recognition.

What, then, would The Master advise? Wouldn't he say that, under the circumstances, the wisest thing to do would be to analyze the minds of human officials of the highest rank and then judge them on the basis of the evidence?

But how can I reach those officials; make them listen to me? Through the FBI, perhaps? Now what was the name of that FBI man Bentham met at the club last week?... Smiley?... That was it... Ed Smiley... A nice fellow... Why not call him up and ask his advice? Bentham-Glath reached for the phone!

"Pop!" He whirled as though caught in a crime and stared groggily at Tani. She had donned her first pajamas...white ones with big blue polkadots...and looked even younger than her years as she stood in the doorway. "Don't let that Bentham mug get you down," she grinned.

After tucking her into bed, Glath poured the rest of the brandy into the bathroom wash basin and ordered a carafe of black coffee from Room Service. Bentham, he realized, was smarter than he had thought. Because his fledge personality had dominated that of the broker so easily he had grown over-confident. Because there had been no struggle he had been lulled into a false sense of security which might have undone him.

"Bentham," he thought, "can you hear me?"

There was no answer... There was no need for an answer. Bentham could not fail to understand his every thought. Their symbiosis was so complete that it would be impossible for anyone except another fledge to determine whether host or parasite was dominant. At the moment he was Glath-Bentham because of his superior mental training alone. If, for an appreciable period of time he became Bentham-Glath again, the tables might turn irrevocably. To make things worse, from the human point of view, Bentham was justified in using any stratagem of defeat and oust him.

Apparently alcohol, being a narcot-

ic, worked against fledge dominance. Coffee, a stimulant, might work in its favor; at least it would keep him alert until Tani, bless her heart, could sleep and recuperate. Thank the stars she seemed to be complete mistress of her fate. He poured a full cup and drank it scalding hot...

* * *

WATERY daylight was shining through the windows when Tani shook him.

"Did I...?" He scrambled to his feet, aghast.

"Nuh huh," she chuckled. "I cut the phone cord and swiped the door key last night before I let you put me to bed. Now go take a cold shower and we'll do some roadwork; you gotta get in shape."

"How about breakfast?" That must have been Bentham's protest.

"Breakfast for you is the rest of the coffee in that thermos. Hup!"

The daylight hours, when broadcasting conditions are poor, they spent prowling the weeping streets, looking at humanity with alien eyes. (With alien eyes, that is, except when his would light up at encountering the pretty face of a hurrying, raincoated model, as hers would shine at the sight of a glamorous shop window.)

They saw little that appealed to their fledge selves: Money-grubbing on Wall Street where the flunkies of M.C.B. & K., fawned upon their Veep; golddigging on Broadway and on Park Avenue as well; libraries understaffed; schools overcrowded; housing inadequate. And, under it all, the hysterical drift toward World War III. This last was obvious in the screaming newspaper headlines which gloated over the Moon Rocket as a military coup but almost ignored it as another step in man's long journey toward the stars.

"Well," challenged Tani as they taxied homeward through the dusk, "are humans our pals yet, Pop?"

"I'm afraid not." He stared out wearily through the recurrent drizzle which now threatened to turn into snow. "They've still got a long way to go; and yet I feel a fondness for them."

"Probably the Bentham in you." She, too, was looking out of the car window, chin on hand, like an elfin Thinker. But when I see somethin' like that..." She nodded at the marquee of a movie house which splashed multicolored lights across the wet pavement, "I forget all about bein' a fledge. I wanna kick up my heels and cheer. We'll have to be on our guard; gotta be tough!"

"Well, here's yer chance, kid," said their driver. "Lookit th' mob yer gonna have tuh buck gittin' into th' Towers."

Glath opened the door as they drew to the curb. He was impaled in the glare of a dozen exploding flash bulbs before he could duck back into the taxi.

"Git—outa—here—yuh dope!" In her excitement, Tani reverted. "They'll crucify yuh." She lunged into the mob of reporters and photographers, using bony knees and elbows as weapons. As their ambushers gave ground momentarily she raced across the lobby followed by her adopted father.

Disregarding shouts of "Hey, Bentham, when are you gonna marry the gal?" "Just one picture, Mr. Bentham" and "Won't do you no good to hide, Billy Boy," they leaped into an elevator and were scooped heavenward by its alert operator.

"Now what?" panted Glath when they had locked themselves into their suite. "Billy Boy! When the morning editions come out neither of us will dare go outside without a police escort."

"Serves us right. We should have known Aunt Jo would talk soon's she got a couple of shots. Some spies we are!"

"What shall I have sent up for dinner?" He changed the painful subject.

"Crow," she twinkled. "And while we're waiting for it, we'd better start DXing; at this rate they'll have us both in jail tomorrow."

Looking exactly the parts of sedate father and fidgety daughter, they sat together on the overstuffed

sofa and let their minds interlace. This time it was easier, either because of previous practice or because Tani's brain capacity was increasing by leaps and bounds under the prodding of her new personality.

THE WAITER who served their food kept dropping forks and looking over his shoulder until Tani got the giggles. The fellow's mind, unreceptive though it was, couldn't help being thrown into an uproar by the full impact of a telepathic carrier wave which, by now, blanketed the earth.

"Give up?" the girl asked half an hour later as she finished a double helping of ice cream. "The rest of us must be dead and my head's full of mush again."

"Not yet," Glath frowned. "I seem to be getting something, though it's badly distorted. Could it be...?" He leaned forward, clamping his teeth on Bentham's after-dinner cigar. "Lilan?" he projected. "In The Master's name, answer!"

A faraway, but lurid, blaze of mental fireworks rewarded him. Translated into words, it would have approximated: *Why in obscenity can't you two let me alone? I'm ready to drop.*

"Lilan!" Their hearts leaped. "Where are you?"

"Where I should be, of course... on the Moon."

"The Moon!" The carrier almost collapsed under the shock.

"Right! I'm chief physicist with the Army expedition. We've just finished working 48 straight hours to set up the guided missile projectors. My staff has gone back to the rocket to get some sleep. I'm standing by at the base...just in case."

"What do you mean, 'just in case'?" This from Glath.

"Well, right about now Washington should be broadcasting a proposal for the immediate establishment of a United States of the World. No trouble is expected... but you never can tell."

"No, Lilan!" Tani's thought fairly screamed across a quarter million

miles of space. "It can't be done that way!"

"Why not?"

"Because any real world government must arise out of the will of the people of that world; we learned that at The Hall."

"Still the visionary, aren't you, Tani?" jeered the physicist. "Far as I can see, the peoples of Earth have, as yet, developed no collective will. They have evolved very little while we have slept."

"A world government dominated by one great power might be a good thing...for fledgdom," Glath interposed thoughtfully. "Two thousand years ago, if I read Bentham's memories correctly, scientists and philosophers in the Greek city states developed the background for a highly mechanized civilization. They invented the steam engine, weighed the sun and all that. Then came the Roman Empire. As a result, progress soon stopped, decay set in and humanity reverted to barbarism."

"Now humans are on the verge of reaching the stars once more. But they still haven't outgrown many of their savage, cave-man instincts. History repeats itself. Perhaps another world empire—no matter how benevolent—will set them back a few more millenia."

"That's what The Master wants, isn't it?" Lilan shot at them.

"Yes!" Glath shouted the words aloud. "The Master wants peace!"

"Shame! Shame on both of you!" Tani was in a fury. Her freckles stood out like tiny specks of gold on a face gone dead white. "You're thinking like humans, not fledges. Lilan, you're dreaming subconsciously of being kingpin at Moon Base, with the absolute power of life or death over two billion people down on Earth. Glath, you're letting Bentham whisper to you about the millions you'll make out of this."

"You know as well as I do," she stormed on, "that The Master doesn't seek 'peace at any price'. And the Council acted as it did for two reasons only: To keep fledgdom from becoming brutalized and to give

humanity a chance to grow up. Am I right?"

UNABLE TO meet the wise old eyes of the girl across the table, Glath arose and paced the room. "But as Lilan says," he argued, "humanity doesn't seem to have grown up. You can't change human nature, apparently. Let the worthless race destroy itself if it wishes. Why should we care?"

"I care 'cause I *like* humans, con-found it!" the girl exploded. She jumped up, hitched herself to a perch on top of the mantel which surmounted the artificial fireplace and sat there, drumming her heels angrily. For the first time Glath stopped thinking of her as a Brooklyn guttersnipe.

"Your bodies are old and half-dead already," she pecked away at them. "They hate change because change means hard work for them. Besides, both of you somehow have absorbed the worst of all human traits from your hosts. You itch for power over others. You try to rationalize these emotions, so your thinking gets all screwed up."

"See here!" Lilan started to object. "Not even The Master could talk to me like..."

"Shut up. Let me finish. My thought pattern may not be as beautifully sharp as yours...after all, I'm using a human kid's brain to think with...*but my pattern is a lot sounder* than yours are. My body wants to grow and develop, for one thing. On the other hand, I've been brought up in the slums where nobody has any power. And I can tell you something you'll never learn by yourselves: Ordinary human folks are basically decent. There are a few stinkers, but most people wouldn't hurt a fly. They don't want power over others; they just want to be let alone."

"You certainly have acquired a profound knowledge of human nature in a short time," said Lilan, but there was little sting in his mockery.

"Slum kids learn a lot fast."

"How about Aunt Jo?" asked Glath.

"All right. How about her?" The girl jumped from her perch and grabbed him by the lapels. "If you had taken the kicking around she's taken all her life because she was poor and not too bright, you'd be dead instead of thirty pounds overweight. Aunt Jo's still in there pitching. Treated me like a dog, but I gotta...I must hand it to her. Why..." she burst into delighted laughter, "I did hand it to her, didn't I? Five thousand smackers!"

Glath wasn't listening. He was fighting a battle. He sensed that Lilan was doing the same. "Tani is right," he gasped after he had managed to lock a loathsome adversary into a small corner of his psyche. "Humanity must have its chance. Those bombs must never have the slightest chance of falling from the Moon."

There was no answer for several minutes. Lilan had broken contact. Finally, however, he came in again, tense with excitement. "Radar message just received from Washington," he said. "Ten nations have rejected the United States of the World proposal on the grounds of implied duress; they're all willing to discuss the idea, but not until we dismantle this base."

"Has Washington decided on a course of action?" Glath demanded.

"The High Brass are conferring at the Pentagon. There's some talk of 'police action', I understand. If you were Brass, what would you want to do with a shiny new toy like this one on the Moon?"

"We are Brass," Tani giggled. "Let's blow the darn thing sky high."

"Lilan would be killed by the blast," said Glath.

"That doesn't matter," growled the physicist. "I never craved living forever. The point is that if all this stuff goes up at once it is likely to set off a chain reaction. If it does, the Moon won't be a healthy place to light on for quite a spell. We'll be safe a little while longer."

"And afterwards..." Glath was

staring unseeingly at a gold fleur-de-lis on the wallpaper. The second 'trigger' had tripped as soon as the decision about Moon Base had been reached. "...afterward, Tani and I must report to The Master. There is a ship hidden and camouflaged in the Rockies. It is fueled, provisioned to feed a thousand fledges instead of two, and ready for takeoff."

"There is a ship, all right," Lilan chuckled. "But you can't..." The thought broke like a piece of piano wire.

"Can't what?" Tani asked.

"Never mind. And now, goodbye friends. I have about three hours hard work to do before this place is ready to blow. Don't try to contact me again; I won't have the time or energy to answer. Luck!" His thought blanked out.

THE TELEPHONE began to ring.

Feeling as though he had just been run over by a truck, Glath groped for it and finally got the receiver off the hook.

"Hello? W.H.?" an excited voice chattered in his ear. "This is Tom."

"Tom?" He tried desperately to collect his thoughts.

"Yeah. Tom Wilson, your lawyer... What's the matter with you, W.H? Don't you feel all right?"

"I feel fine."

"Well, why in blue blazes didn't you consult me then before you adopted that kid? Confound it, I almost feel like walking out on you."

"I'm sorry; I didn't think, Tom."

"Didn't think is right. You know what's happened?"

"What?"

"You remember that guy Smithfield?"

"Smithfield? That wretch at the club?"

"Yeah. He's out to get you. Soon's he read the bulldog editions he scooted over to Brooklyn and got the girl's aunt to file a kidnapping charge against you. Must have paid her off handsomely."

"And...?" Glath was recovering from his shock now and beginning to enjoy himself.

"Well, I just got a call from Smithfield, W.H. He'll call off his dogs if you'll cut him in on the Steel deal; otherwise he's out to chop you to ribbons and force you to resign from M.C.B. & K."

"What do you advise, Tom?"

"I'd say to run for it except that there's a cop in the lobby with a warrant for your arrest. I can get something on Smithfield if I have a few days to do it in, but..."

"Don't worry about that warrant, Tom; I can dodge it all right. Tell you what. You charter a fast plane for my daughter and me. We're leaving about dawn."

"O.K. The radio says the weather is beginning to clear so you won't be grounded. Idlewild Field?"

"Fine. Tell the pilot we're heading for the Rockies. And tell him we'll need parachutes."

"Jeepers, you are on the run, aren't you, boss? But don't worry; I'll have Smithfield eating out of my hand in a week and this will all blow over."

"Well, what do you think of the human race after that conversation?" Glath asked as he hung up.

"Same as I did before, only more so," she yawned. "Are we planning to duck during the confusion when Moon Base goes up?"

"Um."

"Then I'd better take a catnap. I'm not used to such late hours."

She curled up on the sofa like a kitten. Once Glath heard her whisper "Poor old Lilan". Five minutes later she was sound asleep.

He sat on the other side of the mock fireplace staring at the "fire" of electric bulbs disguised behind rotating strips of colored plastic. Did this, he wondered, epitomize human progress, or was Tani right?

* * *

Three hours later, almost to the minute, the cloud bank which still shrouded New York blazed briefly with the glory of seven suns! In the resulting confusion, nobody paid any attention to a plump gentleman and a sleepy little girl when they left their hotel and joined the upward-staring throngs in the streets.

3

“WHY, IT’S the old *Polaris*!” shouted Glath late the next afternoon. He unbuckled the straps of his collapsed parachute and stared in wonder at what looked to be a splinter of granite which jutted into the steel blue mountain sky a quarter of a mile away. Moving as in a dream, he approached the false outcrop. He pressed just so on certain of its fissures. He stood aside as the ponderous lock of the camouflaged space ship unscrewed itself with a sigh of compressed air.

“Wonderful,” crooned Tani. “All these centuries she had stood unnoticed... just because she looked like a hunk of rock. I was her astrogrator, Glath. Remember?” They tiptoed inside the vessel.

“And a lousy one, at least when I was on the bridge,” he teased her. “Always cutting corners. Remember the time you bet me the *Polaris* could circumnavigate the universe in one year?”

“She did it too,” laughed the girl, “even though I did jam her up so close to light speed that I doubled her size for a while.”

“The Master almost plucked you for that,” he reminisced fondly.

“Will she still fly, do you suppose?” Tani asked as they reached the dust-shrouded control room.

“Of course; she was built to last forever.” He spoke with a confidence he did not feel as they began stripping airtight plastic coatings from the instruments.

Night fell long before they completed checking the controls and the drive.

“Built to last forever,” Tani admitted as they scrubbed the grease off their hands. “You hungry yet, Pop?”

“I could eat... particularly if you stopped making those remarks about my waistline.”

She punched sundry buttons and they waited eagerly for the automatic kitchen to serve them real fledge meals. Nevertheless, when the food arrived, nicely chilled, they did

not attack it with the gusto they had expected.

“Nutritious,” was Glath’s comment when he had forced himself to finish.

“Um,” said the girl. “Reminds me of how much I like corned beef and cabbage... Well, it should be a short trip. Let’s get going.”

Glath brushed the feathery dust of ages from two of the bank of curiously-shaped-and-cushioned pilot seats, clipped Tani into a shock harness which fitted her badly and did the same for himself.

“Now we’ll see.” He depressed the main power switch.

The auto-pilot responded instantly with the old red flicker... mindlessly clamoring for course, destination and takeoff time. Automatically, also, Tani started punching in the well-remembered coordinates.

“Careful, Rip Van Winkle,” he warned. “There’s bound to have been some galactic drift since we’ve been asleep; ‘you’d better check that course.’”

“We’d better do it together,” she frowned. “I don’t know whether this brat brain of mine is up to unified field mathematics.” As she spoke she cut in the electronic ‘scopes and the calculator and flipped a toggle which opened the forward viewport for them.

Wheels and cams stirred in perfect bearings which needed no lubrication. A bit of dust drifted down. The port sighed open.

Briskly he punched out a routine request for an orbit to The Hall.

The calculator clucked and stuttered, finally flipping out a card full of figures and symbols which meant absolutely nothing to him. “Master Mind seems to be in a daze,” he said to Tani, failing to note that she, too, seemed in a daze as she stared out of the open port. “Well, let’s try him on something simple.” He asked the exact location of the home nebula.

He blinked stupidly at the answer when it came and even translated it into English to see whether it made any sense.

Great Spiral Nebula (M 31 in Andromeda). That part at least was

right. *Distance from Earth 900,000 light years. Receding from Earth at 1/7th speed of light...* There was a lot more but he hurled the card to the floor without reading further.

"We're in trouble, Tani," he said. "Master Mind seems to have had a nervous breakdown."

"I shouldn't wonder," she answered dully.

He glanced sidewise at her, then whirled. Fingers idle on the calculator keys; face white as chalk in the dashlights, she was squinting painfully, as though trying to see through a dense fog.

"What's the matter with you?"

"There's something wrong with the stars," she breathed. "Look!"

HE FOLLOWED her glance. At first all he saw through the port was a greatly magnified Moon... a Moon which differed from the one he remembered only because a new crater bubbled with crimson light in ancient Copernicus. Then his attention shifted to the surrounding sky... the first stretch of clear firmament he had seen since his awakening.

"Something wrong with my eyes, I guess," he thought, rubbing the back of one hand across them. "The sky looks black!"

"The sky is black!" she almost snarled at him in her panic.

"The overcast must have come back."

"Then how can we see the Moon?"

For a few moments he fished back through Bentham's memories.

"The night sky is black now," he admitted at last as though pronouncing his own doom. "It is not bright, almost as day, the way we knew it."

"Yes, I know that too, Glath, now that I've thought about it. But why?" Her voice rose to a wail. "What has become of the stars?"

"There are stars," he marvelled. "But how few of them, and how dim. Have their fires burned low? No, that can't be possible." He hurled himself at the calculator as though to tear its keys out. Soon he held in his hand a second card which read: *Great Spiral Nebula (M*

31 in Andromeda). Distance from Earth 900,000 light years. Receding from Earth at 1/7th light speed.

"Well, daughter," he said wryly as he handed over the card, "unless M. M. has gone insane—and, I don't think it has—we seem to be a long way from home."

"Nine hundred thousand light years!" She bit the knuckles of her clenched fist as she stared into the blackness and did some lightning calculating. "M 31 receding at 1/7th... Now, when we were at The Hall, the entire universe was less than one light year in circumference and as full of stars, galaxies and nebulae as Aunt Jo's mattress was full of bedbugs... That means... *Oh No!*" She crushed out a scream with her fingertips.

"Means what?" he asked although he already knew the answer.

"We've been thinking we slept a few thousand years," she choked; "well, if my math is right, we've been out at least a billion years... a thousand million years."

"Utterly fantastic," babbled Glath, trying to reassure himself although he knew it could not be done. "The human race can't be that old! Why, fifty thousand years ago people were still living in caves... Every archeologist can tell you that."

"But can he tell you that, a hundred thousand years ago, people weren't living in palaces?" She challenged. "Who knows how many ups and downs, from savagery to near-civilization, the race has had? Earth had changed very little in a billion years."

"But The Master could not have planned anything like this," he said. "Something went wrong. What was it?"

"Well, let's see." She picked idly at the calculator. "When we knew it, the universe was in equilibrium. It was tightly curved, like a small soap bubble, because matter—stars, galaxies and the rest—was packed so densely within it.

"But the universe wasn't stable... not even as stable as a soap bubble is. That was because the gravity of all the masses in space was pull-

ing them toward a common center. Only the fact that the universe was spinning rapidly kept them apart.

"A billion years ago a little push toward that common center would have collapsed the universe...turned it into an unthinkable heavy blazing mass perhaps no larger than my fist.

"On the other hand a little push—a mere breath—outward, and the universe of a billion years ago was ready to start expanding to infinite size. The Council gave it that breath of a push in some fashion...by the use of cosmic rays or light pressure, perhaps. Once started, I guess we never were able to reverse the process."

"No wonder the sky is black tonight," said Glath.

SHE WAS rapidly recovering from her fright. "Don't be discouraged; at least the world didn't end while we were snoozing. If we can't get home, how about heading for that little globular cluster of stars called w Centauri?"

"Yes," he recalled with a half smile, "some of the planets in that cluster used to make pleasant stopovers on the route home."

w Centauri, chuckled the calculator after a while. *Distance 21,000 light years. Receding...*

"A galactic star this time!" He punched with stiff fingers.

Proxima Centauri, came to the answer. *Nearest fixed star. Distance 4 1/3 l.y. Receding...*

He kept punching in a kind of frenzy.

Five light years... A thousand light years... A million... the machine sneered. Receding... Receding... Receding...

Only in rare instances did the calculator admit that a sun or nebula might be approaching Sol.

"Marooned," Glath croaked hours later as he cut the main power switch. "Mankind can never reach or threaten the stars again."

He unsnapped the shock harness, dragged himself erect and started to release Tani.

"What's the matter?" There was laughter in her wide green eyes. "You ain't quittin'?"

"Might as well," he sighed. "It would take us thousands of lifetimes to reach The Hall...if there is a Hall."

"Sure," she agreed, "but we might have a lot of fun on the way."

"Don't talk nonsense, child. Fledges aren't immortal, you know."

"I'm not so sure about us, if we work it right; we've survived a right smart spell already, you know."

"Yes, but..." He eyed her sharply. "What are you driving at?"

"Well..." She kicked her heels again, "I was just thinking that if the old *Polaris* can still hit it up close to the speed of light, why Proxima Centauri isn't really more than a whoop and a holler from Earth. We should reach it in less than five years... Used to be a nice place, too."

"Yes, but what about this immortality business, Tani?"

"Well," she wriggled, "I was thinking that if this ship is built to last forever, and if we can make you last a few more years, why, you will be in a position to answer that reporter's question..."

"What reporter's question?" Would he ever understand this girl creature?

"Hey Bentham," she mimicked perfectly the reporter who had chased them through the Towers lobby, "when are you gonna marry the gal?"

"And after that," she rambled on, "we will have children, of course, and we'll probably continue to change hosts from generation to generation, just as we have done in the past... It's worth a try, anyway."

"That's enough! That's enough, woman!" Glath thundered. But he was no longer beaten or weary as he resumed the pilot seat and started lacing himself back into the shock harness.

Shock harness! he thought. Looks as if I'm going to need it plenty on this trip.

"You sure are, Pop."

She winked at him solemnly.

THE END

★ Today and Tomorrow ★

THERE being only twenty-four hours in a day. I haven't been able to write personal notes of appreciation to the readers who have expressed their approval of the book reviews we run, from time to time. The same situation has kept me from finishing the current crop of books, including the two mentioned in our last issue as "having to wait until next time". I do not believe in reviewing a book I haven't read—or, in the case of an anthology, one where I have not read the majority of the stories. So, my apologies to Pellegrini and Cudahy, whom I have kept waiting particularly long; I cannot promise to make pleasant noises about any book, but, when the reviews appear they will express my considered opinions. These opinions, I might add, are derived from reading and giving thought to the book, and not to what anyone else; including the author or anthologist, has to say about it.

This attitude seems to be somewhat old-fashioned, considering the amount of "reviews" one sees these days which are little more than rehashes of jacket blurbs, comments derived from some other reviewer's opinions, camaraderie with authors, and so on. I stand by an older, somewhat sterner system of reviewing, one which George Bernard Shaw, among others, clung to in his famous music criticisms. Shaw noted, when attacked for his outspoken remarks—remarks which differed widely from the general tone of the times in criticism—that the true critic is one who becomes your personal enemy on the strength of a single bad performance, and he can only be appeased by a good performance. And, as another fine critic has noted, criticism does not consist of merely stating that this is "good", and that is "less good", and something else is "bad"—but in the reasons why the critic considers something "good", "less good", or "bad".

Having long been irritated by the good-fellows-together school of criticism, I am determined not to perpetrate such inanity upon the readers of *Future*, even if it costs me the friendship or moderate good wishes of every science fiction writer I know.

* * *

A reader writes in to object to the comments on "Dianetics," and goes on to criticise Freud, asking "Did Freud take

eleven years of research and checking before publication; did he have even a fifty-fifty cure?" And so on. This reader, and others, seem to think that proving Freud wrong, or half wrong, proves Dianetics right; all this is irrelevant. As I have noted elsewhere, my comments on Dianetics amount to a simple notation of ascertainable facts: in his book, Hubbard makes specific claims to the effect that Dianetics is a *science*. There is no proof of this in the book, nor have I seen any proof of this anywhere else. I did not state or imply that there was no validity to *any* of the contentions, but merely that the *conclusions* are doubtful, at best. And that most of what is presented as evidence proves nothing in relation to the bulk of the claims. Proof *may* be forthcoming from the Dianetics Foundation, but the Foundation is not the book, and the book is so presented as to give dangerous misimpressions to any reader not equipped to see through the mass of semantic trickery it contains. As I said before, it's fascinating and well written—but it *isn't* scientific. It isn't scientific, for example, to decide that because something ought to be so, or because it would be wonderful if such and such were so, that therefore it is so. That is the basis of current Soviet biology; it's the basis of a large amount of political action. But it still isn't science.

Having taken this stand, I must state further that I shall not hesitate to recommend Dianetics, at some future date, *if* it proves nothing in relation to the bulk of indeed be wonderful if a "science of the mind" (I put that in parenthesis because the expression, in itself, is contrary to scientific terminology; and implies that the "mind" is somehow a separate unit, split off from the "body", etc.) actually existed. IF...

For our next issue, Poul Anderson is back with a thought-provoking feature story entitled "Incomplete Superman", one which, for me, is on a par with the many other fine stories science fiction readers have been seeing from him. Margaret St. Clair is with us, presenting "Age of Prophecy", a story which we hope will remain fiction and not become "cold fact tomorrow." And we hope that you will receive the impact we did from J. Harvey Haggard's short story, "Fun Can Last Forever." RWL

GREEN MAN'S ★ ★ ★ GRIEF

by Richard S. Shaver

A very colorful gentleman was Harry Green — and a very unhappy one!

GREEN is a very good color. I have nothing whatever against green when it stays in its place. On the trees or on the grass, on St. Patrick's day—green is wonderful.

I try to console myself that every man has his burden in a world admittedly far from Utopian. Some men have bowed legs; others are scrawny, underfed, dimwitted or nondescript in their defective parts. But my efforts go gurgling down the drain when some young sweet thing whom I have happened to glance at with over-appreciative eyes promptly falls into hysterics at sight of my singular complexion.

You may have read of the colored laborers who successfully sued a certain manufacturer of industrial chemicals. It seems these gentlemen were shoveling about some little known new compound in carload lots. Contact with the stuff metamorphosed patches of the laborers hide from a virile mahogany to a pale and sickly pink. No-one said a word about white-supremacy when the lads went to court and collected a sizeable compensation for this chance removal of some of their excuse for segregation.

About here you will probably guess what happened to my epithelium. My position in this vale of work and worry and wages depends upon my skill at operating a mechanical contraption called a capsuling machine. There are a myriad mauve-syllabled drugs that our multitudinous drug-stores retail with dignified and confident carelessness. If they only knew what a difference a syllable

or so in the name could mean to the drug's effect upon the customer, they would not hand them out so nonchalantly. They seldom handle the drugs in other forms than the capsule.

I stand beside a row of great bins in a wholesale drug house. The bins are full of various combinations of poly-syllabled dynamite. I ladle the materials into a hopper, run it through the mixer, start the capsule attachment, and put the labels on the boxes. Boxes of cute little gelatin capsules emerge from the other end of the gadget, containing stuff to curl up your hair on your toes, depending on the formula.

Arsphenamine and meta-arsphenamine are fairly common tools of the doctors handbag, always present and specific for a certain well known but little-mentioned disease. I put quite a lot of it into capsules.

MY TROUBLES began when a certain medical outfit turned in an order for a great quantity of a formula which, (since I know more about it) I have come to call "meta-morpho - argyria - veridian - pseudo-arsphenamine" and several thumping cuss words beside.

I suspect strongly that the gentleman who first originated that formula was one of those over-worked and over-educated medicos addicted to wild scribbling in Latin. If you ever looked closely at a Doctor's handwriting on a prescription, you have noticed, of course, that only by the use of black magic could anyone but a pharmacist decipher the usual script. Yes, these doctors order some-

(Illustration by Poulton)



My color blended with the trees as I hid from the outraged neighbors.
I waited, shaken with remorse...

thing for your stomach (that in case of mistake would promptly double you up in deathly cramps) with handwriting that a mad monkey would refuse to own.

Whatever he meant to order for his line of drug stores, this particular worthy ordered a formula never before concocted. Our "experts" had quite a time with it, but finally turned out an innocuous-looking white powder which seemed harmless, and told me to capsule it. I capsuled, ignorantly, obediently, and tragically.

I remember distinctly now how my nose itched. Whether it was from breathing the white dust it gave off, whether my nose just plain itched, I was very busy that day scratching.

It wasn't till two weeks later that my nose turned a bright Kelly green and stayed that way.

Now I am not a man given to peering overlong into a mirror. My girl seemed to approve of my face—and that was all I asked—up until my nose went into the verdigrisial decline.

"Harry Green," said Myrtle, laughing, "don't you think your little joke is a little gauche? Please wipe it off now!"

I obediently scrubbed and polished, but the green stayed on. We didn't go out that night, or any night thereafter. We stayed home and played cribbage, till Myrtle got tired of cribbage. Then I stayed home alone.

The next day after the fatal night the green area had spread across both cheek bones and down on the upper lip. My hitherto commonplace mug had acquired a glory all its own. If I had been born Irish I could have joined the "Sons of Erin" and been elected High Mogul. But I am not Irish.

I went to a lawyer, told him my suspicions as to the pseudo-arsphenamine, etc. drug and the peculiar variety of "argyria" I had acquired from working at Markey's capsuling. He sued for fifty grand.

No-one seemed to give a thought to the people who were taking the

capsules; maybe the wholesaler recalled the shipment. Anyway they settled for twenty thousand. You see, I hadn't realized the extent of my damages, and my final glory of pigmentation was yet to come.

If I had held out, I could probably have owned Markey's, lock stock and barrel. But how could anyone know? It hadn't happened before.

AFTER MY girl gave me the gate, I took my twenty grand, my busted heart, a clean shirt, an extra pair of socks, and went to Miami.

I figured a good dark tan might obscure the color, which was now the moldy dead tint of some anaemic lichen. But I figured without the beach police; they chased me, insisting I must be either suffering from some terrible and infectious plague, or else that I was a corpse too dumb to know it ought to stay in its grave. I did not give them a chance to put me back.

It was then I decided to purchase an island. There are quite a number of islands that can be reached from Florida, and there are schools of real estate sharks eager to sell you anything for everything you've got.

It wasn't until I had completed my Robinson Crusoe hut, bought a couple of milk goats, a thirty foot motorboat, and turned bright green clear down to my knees—it wasn't until I had motor-boated past a neighboring island which swarmed with naiads, or nymphs, or something, whose bright laughing sounds made my lonesome heart turn to water as I boated past—that the diabolical plot began to hatch under my so far still plain brown thatch.

It was only a little egg, at first, that plot. Motoring by the other islands, I would hear feminine squeals of laughter, see lithe brown maidens fleeing from or being caught by brown muscular youths—and I would turn still more brilliant veridian with envy.

I would wish for my dear Myrtle—or a complacent facsimile. I would dream of a girl, likewise green and

hence able to appreciate the subtler delights of l'amour de vert.

So it was that the sinister and utterly unworthy idea struck me a stroke as overwhelming as a hit-and-run bumper.

Why hadn't I thought of it before? It was so simple, it was moronic! But the details proved far from simple, though far more spectacular in results than expected.

You have no idea how hard it is to get a strange girl, whom you have never met socially, to take a bath in water you have especially prepared by dissolving in it twenty pounds of a formula manufactured to your own order.

I GOT THE special formula, in ten pound paper sacks. I never went near that wholesale house again, but I read, in the papers, that they paid off handsomely. I deduced there were several other green hermits cast adrift on the cruel shores of Miami beach, but I never saw any of them. I had my stuff, a hundred pounds of guaranteed metamorphosine—or should I say, *pseudo-metamorphosarsphenamine - argyria - sinistra*? I am sure I don't know nor care at this date.

Now all that remained was to get the right kind of young female to take a bath in that stuff and I would have a suitable mate! The veridian Adam and Eve would then begin to furnish their garden of Eden with little green replicas. It was a 100-to-one shot that she would find that only a green man like myself would mate with her.

I laid my plans with fiendish care. I wore my clothes and I carefully painted out my green color with stage paint. Made up like a Kleig-light hero, I sallied forth to visit a neighbouring island which seemed to be peopled with sundry nymphs of the correct size and shape, although of the wrong color. I proposed to correct the color.

I told them they were all invited to a housewarming. As neighbours, they seemed to feel duty-bound to attend, particularly as I had pre-

pared my call with a trip to the mainland. I had the motor boat loaded with visible cases of Scotch, Cliquot club, ice, and champagne—three cases of the latter lashed on the bow. Little did they know...



I hurried home, the dire plot thickening. My place had been furnished with plumbing at great expense to my diminishing supply of coin. I had an electric pump, a well, and—best of all—a bathtub complete with tank overhead. It took me an hour to rig a receptacle over the tank which, as sand dribbles through the hour glass, dribbled green deviltry into the water supply. It took me another hour of adjustment to get the dribble cut down until the taste was not apparent.

Then I set out the refreshments, spiked all the scotch with "pseudo-metamorpho - arsphenamine - argyria" as well as mixing a goodly supply into the cracked ice. I placed the ice where every drink mixed would be sure to contain green dynamite.

It was quite a party. Until I forgot, dancing, and wiped my face with a handkerchief. Imagine forgetting a green phiz?

They couldn't, and began to bid me good-by in bunches, until I was left alone with one sleeping drunk. Yes, each and every one of the lithe nymphs upon whom my designs had centered left the green faced monster right after they saw him.

I tried to awaken the drunk. He took one look, then crouched in the corner for an hour. Later I heard him howling through the brush on the island, as I made ready for bed. I never did see him again; whether he struck out for the mainland and drowned, or just evaporated, I will never know.

IT'S SURPRISING how hard it is for people to adjust to a little thing like a green skin! I was disgusted. I gave them two weeks to turn, which was two days more than it took my nose to turn after the first exposure to the sinister "pseudo-metamorphosarsphenamine-argyria".

With the dose I had gotten into them, I was pretty sure that I was going to have some partners in the adventure of being green. I was never cut out to be a hermit, and now was my chance to strike up some life-time friendships with some nice green people.

If I had only realized the depths of my infamy, the terrible crime I had really committed, I would probably have dived to the bottom of the Atlantic and never come up! I may have to, anyway.

You see, my green-ness had arisen from minute quantities of pseudo-metamorphosarsphenamine-argyria" applied by rubbing on of hands and by breathing. But the victims of my plot had consumed considerable amounts of a drug unknown to medicine for what it really is. Considerable amounts—as much as I could handily arrange for them to consume.

At the end of two weeks, I got into my motored gondola and leisurely sped across the briny to the neighbours. I parked beside a long shiny mahogany speedster with a chrome handrail. I wondered at the eerie silence pervading the hitherto rather noisy place where some fourscore

inhabitants habitually made merry morning noon and night.

I wondered, as I plodded up the path, my green skin blending neatly with the foliage that rioted tropically.

I wondered, as I came to the cluster of cabins, hitherto always emanating clatter and babble audible for a mile across the water. Now they were shuttered and silent; one would have thought they had holed up for a hurricane. Maybe I had missed the usual storm warnings? But I hadn't missed a thing.

It was then I saw my first inhuman being. It was about three years old, playing in the sand with a shovel and a pail. It was bright green. I hadn't noticed any kids at the party! Then I remembered I had spiked the ginger ale; some of those voyager-visitors must have toted home the ginger ale; some of those voyager-was bright green, and my face tried to blush a deep red of shame—and failed.

I steeled my errant heart, and feeling like Mr. Hyde calling on Dr. Jekyll. I knocked on the door. A faint feminine voice called: "Who's there?"

I said: "Harry Green, your neighbour! I would like to talk to you."

The feminine voice rose to shrill angry screaming: "You monster! And then with the gall to come cracking a joke like that! *Harry Green*, indeed! I've a good mind to take this gun and put a bullet through your black evil heart!"

You know how some women can sound off, when they get properly aroused? For an hour straight without repeating themselves! Well, this uncharming voice went on and on: "Making a joke out of a tragedy like this is something I will not stand for! Whoever you are, just go away and leave me to my grief. Do you think I want to live with a green face the rest of my life? Do you think a woman has any future left? Please go away before I lose my control and add murder to my other miseries."

With which she broke into loud

sobs and she did not open the door. I did not meet my green girl at that house.

I WENT on knocking at each door, and received much the same reaction. At last I gave up and dragged myself, weary and heavy with the green guilt of my crime back to my lonely island.

But that was not the end. They say "murder will out"; well, I can tell you, from this safe distance, the verdigris trick I had pulled did not remain my own secret. I got stuck with it, after they had put their heads together. They added two and two and the answer was Green. Harry Green. They wanted to do murder, and they did not care whether it outed or inned.

I saw them coming, and took to the trees. They swarmed up on my beach, out of their boats, a party of at least fifty, half green, half plain angry red. Those horrible green bodies, in the swimming trunks, angrily clenching fists carrying rifles, clubs, knives, bottles and a ball bat or two.

I did a Tarzan act the movies would have paid for, getting out of the vicinity of that invasion without descending to the ground. I had only wanted one green nymph to complete my island paradise; my mistake, I saw, was in providing for them in carload lots.

As I swung through the trees, lamenting silently, my lithe green body blending with the riotous foliage, my nose vying with the parrots' tails for green-ness, my legs down to the toenails likewise as violent a green as any macaw ever sported, I felt remorse and guilt in floods. I also felt thorns. I realized I should not have drank any of that spiked liquor at the party, but I had, and now I was far greener than before.

I wept green tears of guilt and shame. And I couldn't figure how I was going to get next to a green nymph while she was thirsting for my heart on a stick, or praying to see my ribs bashed in.

After a while, they went home

again. But the first time I showed my face, going back to the cabin for a lunch, a rifle cracked from a tree close at hand. They had left a sniper to plug me, and I believe they meant business. I took up my habitation on the far side of the island, building myself a tree house, reachable only by a vine ladder. It was an arduous existence.

Weeks went by, and the search parties ceased to come; I began to feel less like a cat caught on a high tension line. I screwed up my courage to making a trip back to my cabin for supplies.

As I cautiously opened the door, peering in, I sensed a human presence. At first I didn't see it. Then it chortled. There on the floor was a cute little green cherub, playing with my best pair of field glasses. I forgot my peril, strode over and retrieved the glasses, replacing them with an empty gun holster. The child seemed satisfied with the exchange, and chortled again. I didn't stop to think why the holster did not have the gun in it.

As I straightened up, a gorgeous veridian blonde came in from the bathroom which had been instrumental in providing the drugged water. I didn't say anything; I couldn't. She just stood there, gloriously angry, and my gun was in her hand, pointed at me! She was green and wholly pulchritudinous. She began: "Harry Green, you goon, you're lucky to be alive! I ought to shoot you."

I stuttered, "N-n-now see here..." "But I won't! I'll do worse! My husband has left me, applied for a divorce. I got the papers today. He was not present at your dirty party, and he is still a white man. I have decided to get even with you! You are going to support me and the little green goblin you have made out of my son. You, Harry Green, are going to marry me!"

I really believe she expected me to argue. I quietly fainted in her arms. Happiness can be too great; a man can only stand so much.

THE END

Slave Psychology

by Edwin James

These natives were so completely docile, so eager to serve—it didn't seem quite right.

"The natives of Sol III are a perfect race of slaves," said Sar Ghan, wrapping a long tentacle around an intricately shaped glass brimming with a sparkling, emerald-green liquid, "obedient but stupid. And yet..."

SAR GHAN glided slowly along a winding lane, through the lovely green countryside of fields and orchards, sniffing the air appreciatively. It was a beautiful planet—after the long years in space and compared with the cold harshness of Klast, planet of the sun the natives called Achernar.

A native approached from down the lane. Sar Ghan watched him critically, baring the feelers at the base of his skull to catch his vibrations.

The native bowed low as they met, remaining bent until Sar Ghan motioned him upright with one of his eight tentacles. "Noble master," said the native humbly, "is there any way I can serve your greatness?"

Sar Ghan studied him for a moment and sighed. The vibrations were correct. There was a cringing feeling of servile obedience, an eager desire to please and serve, even—yes, in spite of everything—a warm glow of gratitude to the conquerors for being ruled.

Sar Ghan sighed again. Someday he hoped to catch these curiously shaped, bifurcated natives who called themselves men in a feeling of fear, antagonism, even hatred—the emotions he would have felt had the situation been reversed. Then he would have felt that everything was as it should be; he would have known what to do.

Instead he felt—as the other members of the expedition felt, he knew—a vague uneasiness. It was too

good, too easy. These natives of Sol III were perfect slaves—too perfect.

Sar Ghan shifted a little on the many-fingered fringe which supported his barrel-like body. "Bring me one of the fruit of those trees," he said.

The native turned quickly, eagerly, and ran into the unfenced orchard. In a moment he was back holding out a glossy green sphere respectfully and hopefully.

Sar Ghan stared at the fruit. It was obviously immature. "Stupid!" he said. "This is unripe."

The native stood shivering with Sar Ghan's displeasure. His eyes filled with the moisture which signified sorrow to this race.

"Get another," Sar Ghan said.

Again the native was off at a trot. This time the fruit he brought back was shining and red. The native smiled happily as Sar Ghan took the fruit from his hand and bit into it.

It was delicious. Sar Ghan savored the sweet, spicy juice that trickled from the firm flesh. Klast had nothing like this. He considered the native again while he ate.

The creature was stupid. They all were; all of them stupid. One had to give them explicit directions, and even then they might get them wrong. How they had managed to become the dominant animal life on this planet was beyond him; perhaps because it was such a pleasant, harmless place.

A pleasant, harmless race on a pleasant, harmless planet. The idea pleased him. He would bring it up at the next council meeting. Tih Plur would like it. He could see him now, rolling the phrase around, feeling it on all sides, and sending out finally a warm vibration of satisfaction.

"What is your name?" asked Sar Ghan.

The question was asked with little hope. They were indistinguishable. They all looked alike, with their pallid, uniform features, and all had the same servile vibrations. It was difficult enough to tell the males from the females. "John Smith, noble master," the native said.

Always the same.

"Are you all named John Smith?" asked Sar Ghan.

"All the men, noble master."

"How do you tell each other apart, then?"

The native's eyes widened with thought. "Is it necessary, noble master? I know I am I. What else is important? However, if the noble master wishes..."

"No," said Sar Ghan impatiently. "It doesn't matter."



The huge freighter shivered on a pillar of flame.

*Illustration
by Fawcette*

If they adopted other names they would switch them around haphazardly. Besides, the council had adopted a policy of non-interference; why should they interfere when everything was done to please them?

Sar Ghan felt a vibration on his feelers. It was a personal salute. He turned to survey the lane behind him. Kol Stom, the historian, was gliding along the path. Sar Ghan returned the salute and waited until the other was beside him.

The native was still there.

"Very well," said Sar Ghan, "you may go about your business."

The native turned to Kol Stom and bowed deeply. "Noble master," he said, "is there anything I can do for your greatness?"

Kol Stom refused.

The native bowed deeply again to both of them and walked slowly away. Vibrations of sadness that the native could not be of service beat back upon Sar Ghan.

A BEAUTIFUL planet, Kol Stom," said Sar Ghan. "I never cease to marvel at it."

They stood on top of a low hill overlooking the valley which sheltered their space ship and the huge administration building the natives had constructed so happily for the conquerors.

"I am glad we decided to locate in the country instead of the city," Kol Stom said. "This planet"—his many-lidded eyes swept the horizon—"I think it must be paradise where the good Dlar go when they have lived out their lives on Klast."

"And these natives are the souls of Dlar?" Sar Ghan scoffed. "Even, the disembodied spirits of Dlar would not be such a stupid, weak, servile people as this."

"Perhaps we can make it the living paradise for Klast," Kol Stom said. "The natives are no problem; if necessary we can exterminate them or instigate birth control measures to ease them out of existence."

"It isn't time for that," said Sar Ghan. "The philosophy of conquest calls for ceaseless efforts for many years yet. Each planet must be garisoned lightly with its inhabitants

brought into subjection and its resources exploited to make the Conquest self-sustaining. If the Dlar were to settle each promising planet as it was taken, we would lose our vigor and the Conquest would fail."

"You may be right," said Kol Stom, stretching his tentacles lazily in the balmy air; "I know I have no zest for further conquest."

"Nor I," said Sar Ghan. "But the Conquest must continue until the galaxy is ours and safe, and then the Dlar can rest."

"Occasionally one wonders," Kol Stom mused, "why the Dlar should have been given cold, bitter Klast while this race of do-nothings, care-nothings, were born on Sol III. Think what the Dlar might have done if they had not had to battle against Klast every step of the way; the Conquest would have been over eons ago."

Sar Ghan's multiple eyelids flicked down one after the other and back up in thought. "All things are planned," he said. "As the psychologists of the Dlar are born with feelers, so we were meant to rule the galaxy."

"What has Klast to do with that?" asked Kol Stom.

"It is Klast's hardships which made the Dlar strong and brave and full of vigor. Look what the easy life has done to these natives. They had never had to fight for anything and so they fall easy prey to the first conqueror, even kissing the hand that rules them. No—bless the harsh winds and barren, rocky slopes of Klast; they made possible the Dlar conquest of the galaxy."

"That is an interesting theory, if true," said Kol Stom. "But in my research I have had cause to wonder if sometimes there might be another way of winning than by force."

"There is no other way," said Sar Ghan firmly. "The strong rise to command; the weak obey. It is conquer or be conquered. That is the one inexorable rule of life."

"Speaking of Klast," Kol Stom said, "when does the cargo ship arrive?"

"Tomorrow," said Sar Ghan. "Sol III is about to pay dividends to Klast

for its conquest and add fuel to the Dlar Conquest of the galaxy."

"An easy dividend," said Kol Stom, "on a conquest without expense."

"Consider what a year has done," Sar Ghan said. "The history of the Conquest has nothing to match it. Within a day of our arrival the natives were gathering to ask how they could serve the Dlar. Within a month the administration building was finished. A year and the first shipment to Klast will be on its way."

Kol Stom assented uneasily.

"Nowhere else has the Conquest succeeded without a battle," he said. "On many of the planets the native population was almost wiped out before it surrendered. The only comparable record is that of a minor planet which was conquered in two years, but the native population was in a primitive stage of civilization. And it was three more years before the first shipment was ready."

"The Leaders on Klast will be pleased," said Sar Ghan.

"And who knows?" said Kol Stom, with a vibration of pleasure, "if the leaders are pleased they may let us stay here as a permanent occupation force."

They mused for a while on that delightful prospect.

"Come," said Sar Ghan. "We have loitered too long. We will be late for the council meeting. And Tih Plur said it would be important."

A PLEASANT, harmless race on a pleasant, harmless planet," Tih Plur, the commander, repeated. "Very good, Sar Ghan; we will have to consider that in our final summation."

"Are we in accord, then," said Bis Trok, in charge of all military matters, "that we are in no danger from the natives?"

They all agreed, although some were without complete assurance.

The warlike tradition of the Dlar, Sar Ghan thought, will never let us feel completely secure, even on so innocent a planet as this.

Bis Trok, satisfied with the answer to his routine question, relaxed. There was little more for him to do.

"The report must be complete,"

said Tih Plur. "The Leaders will be satisfied with nothing less than that. I suggest we review the entire situation in preparation for the compilation of the report which must be finished before the arrival of the cargo ship tomorrow in order that it may return with the ship to Klast."

Again, there was a round of agreement.

"First," said Tih Plur, "you, Sar Ghan, as psychologist will analyze the character of the natives."

"They are unique," said Sar Ghan. "Never, in the history of the Dlar, have we met any animal life like it. Everywhere the theme of life is kill or be killed, conquer or die. There is, however, on Sol III, at least one example of animal life similar to the dominant species."

"And what is that?" asked Tih Plur.

"A small, fluffy, herbivorous animal you may have noticed in the underbrush of the countryside. Without protection from its natural enemies other than speed of flight, it continues to exist through its prolificity and the mildness of its environment."

"What bearing does this have on the native population?" asked Kol Stom.

"The survival of the natives is due to the same reason, its dominance to its higher order of intelligence. The similarity can be carried further. The small animal I cite is timid, easily tamed, and lives well in captivity; these qualities in the natives have been noted before."

"Are these details important, Sar Ghan?" asked Tih Plur.

"They provide a proper background for understanding," said Sar Ghan. "The natives' greater intelligence adds these characteristics to those already given: obedience, a desire to please and serve, and gratitude for being ruled. They have no capacity for fear, hatred, deceitfulness, resentment, antagonism—none of the natural emotions of a conquered people."

"And to sum it up?" prompted Tih Plur.

"A race of slaves, Tih Plur," said Sar Ghan. "A perfect race of slaves."

"Perfection is hard to find," said Tih Plur drily. "It is nice to think that we have run across it here."

JUT DRIR, the sociologist and scientist, was called on next to report on the state of the native civilization.

"It is well advanced into the atomic stage of its development," Jut Drir began. "The cities have been decentralized to a large extent, with most of the population living in small villages or isolated dwellings but interconnected by small personal airships and large passenger and freight ships for long hauls. All power needs are supplied by broadcast energy."

"In other words," said Tih Plur, "a state of civilization in some ways almost equaling that of the Dlar."

Jut Drir agreed.

"Only in conquest do we far outstrip them. They have, apparently, no ships capable of traversing space and no weapons. Their government is haphazard, any citizens who happen to be interested meeting to pass small resolutions which the rest of the citizens may or may not obey as they choose."

"Although that is not the case with our orders," Tih Plur said.

"No," said Jut Drir slowly, "all orders emanating from us or delivered by their governing body for us are obeyed immediately and without question—a somewhat unusual attitude for a race so casual in every other respect."

"But very useful to us," interjected Sar Ghan.

Jut Drir agreed slowly. "The technological level of their civilization assures us of plentiful supplies of atomic materials to ship back to Klast," he said. "The conquest of Sol III should prove safe and profitable."

"Very good," said Tih Plur. "Now you, Kol Stom."

The historian's expression was worried. "I have listened to the reports of Sar Ghan and Jut Drir with much interest and some confusion. As you know, my job has been to compile a history of Sol III and its inhabitants. Only recently have I been able to get any results. And the results have been surprising."

"You mean your findings disagree with those of Sar Ghan and Jut Drir?" said Tih Plur.

"Their conclusions on the present status of the natives are undoubtedly accurate," said Kol Stom. "But they are unfamiliar with several of my most recent discoveries. They may throw an entirely different light on the problem. Or, if they cannot be reconciled with the opinions of Sar Ghan and Jut Drir, a new solution may have to be found."

Sar Ghan and Jut Drir straightened.

"First let me take up Jut Drir's report," Kol Stom went on, "as the least serious of the two in its implications. They have no spaceships and no weapons, he says. That may be true now; but in their recent history I find several references to flights to the other planets of this system."

"May I suggest," said Jut Drir, "that Kol Stom has been misled by literary allusions."

"Possibly," said Kol Stom gravely. "And yet these literary allusions refer to conditions on the planets exactly as we found them."

"Perhaps a better explanation," Jut Drir tossed off, "considering the present lack of spaceships is that they investigated the planets, found them incapable of supporting life, as we did, and abandoned their efforts in space travel."

"A reasonable explanation," Tih Plur interposed. "Your findings do not, at least, alter the present facts, Kol Stom."

"Very well," said Kol Stom. "Sar Ghan's opinion, then, that the natives are a perfect race of slaves. They are timid, he says, easily tamed, obedient, and grateful for being conquered."

"And so they are," said Sar Ghan.

"I do not argue with your interpretation of their present state," said Kol Stom. "But their history up to twenty of their years ago is a bloody one of planet-wide warfare, conquests, and rebellions, even, I might say, bloodier than that of the Dlar. Does the time period mean anything to you?"

They were thoughtful. Finally Tih Plur spoke. "That was about the time

of the arrival in this system of the Dlar survey ship."

"Exactly," said Kol Stom. "And the survey ship was met on Sol III by vigorous attacks until it subdued resistance by reducing one of the planet's few remaining cities to rubble. But, when we arrived, we were met by—as Sar Ghan put it—a submissive race of slaves."

"These things are not difficult to explain," said Sar Ghan. "The psychology is simple. We have examples of it, although not in so extreme a form, all through our history. I suggest, first, that Kol Stom's bloody history is only relative—as the meekest of animals would write up minor conflicts as great battles."

"That is possible," admitted Kol Stom.

"When met by a far superior race, the natives collapsed. All vigorous drives vanished. Since they were to be conquered in any case their subconscious minds protected the organism by removing all resentment, every emotion in opposition, leaving only the malleable race we have now."

Sar Ghan stopped, pleased with the cogeny of his argument.

"Have you any other explanation, Kol Stom," Tih Plur asked.

Kol Stom admitted that he had thought of nothing to explain the inconsistencies.

"Then," said Tih Plur, "I suggest you incorporate the explanations offered in your report, if there are no objections."

No one spoke.

"Very well," said Tih Plur, "summon the native government."

"JOHN SMITH, eh?" said Tih Plur. And leaning toward Sar Ghan he whispered, "Are these the same ones as before?"

Sar Ghan flicked his eyelids in the Dlar equivalent of a shrug.

"Who knows?" he said. "They have no distinguishing features or vibrations like the Dlar; their vibrations are correct."

"Are you the government?" asked Tih Plur.

"We are the government, noble master," said the one slightly in

front. "Is there any way we can serve your greatness?"

Tih Plur hesitated a moment. "Tomorrow," he said, "a ship will arrive, unload its cargo, and take on a new cargo here."

The faces of the natives lighted up.

"Will there be new masters to serve," asked the leader eagerly.

"No," said Tih Plur.

Their faces fell.

"However," said Tih Plur, "you can be of service to the Dlar now."

They were happy again. Their rapid changes of mood never ceased to amaze Sar Ghan. And yet everything was correct, each emotion matched by the right vibration.

"Tomorrow, when the ship has unloaded its cargo, it will take on a new cargo which you will provide," Tih Plur went on. "That cargo will consist of radioactive materials, the details of which will be given you by Jut Drir. Can you supply the materials?"

"Yes, noble master," said the leader without hesitation; "it will be a great pleasure."

"The materials will be delivered to the ship in specially prepared containers," said Tih Plur carefully, "each of which will be automatically inspected and checked for the proper level of radio-activity. Are there any questions?"

The leader thought for a moment. "Is the cargo the ship will bring of value, noble master?"

"Of course," said Tih Plur. "It will be of great value to the Dlar here."

The natives nodded, smiled, and withdrew, Jut Drir following to give them more complete instructions.

"What is the cargo?" asked Kol Stom.

"Heavy weapons," said Tih Plur, his expression puzzled. "I wonder why they asked."

NEXT DAY the landing area was crowded. Sar Ghan had difficulty making his way through the hundreds of excited natives watching the fireworks descent of the freighter. Like little children, they applauded and squealed as the ship finally came to rest. Then all that

faded behind as Sar Ghan climbed into the ship through the opened port.

The captain of the freighter was a taciturn Dlar, short-spoken and imperturbable.

"Here is the official report to be delivered directly to the Leaders on Klast," Sar Ghan said.

The captain took it and waited.

"I suggest," said Sar Ghan, "that your crew be kept aboard ship during your stay here."

"They've been restrained for a long time," rumbled the captain. "Regulations say they are to be given liberty whenever possible."

"Regulations also say that permission may be refused by the Dlar in charge of the liberty area. On my advice the commander of Sol III, Tih Plur, has issued that order."

"May I ask why?" said the captain.

"In the interest of the best operation of your ship," Sar Ghan said. "This planet is too pleasant. At best your crew would return unwilling and uncooperative; at the worst you might be faced with mutiny. The Conquest demands the undivided vigor of every Dlar."

The captain reluctantly agreed. "How will the ship be unloaded and loaded again?" he asked.

"The natives will see to that," said Sar Ghan. "As soon as your cargo is loaded you will take off for Klast."

The captain was still grumbling as Sar Ghan left. Outside the unloading was proceeding rapidly. As each new object was brought into view the audience exclaimed appreciatively.

Jut Drir was showing off in front of them. He assembled one of the heavy weapons, trained it on a distant peak, and fired. The peak disappeared, and the natives clapped and yelled.

Stupid, Sar Ghan thought, and he turned back to the unloading. A conveyor belt extended into the bowels of the ship and was turning rapidly, bringing the contents of the freighter to a warehouse where willing native hands received them and stacked them carefully. The warehouse was filling rapidly.

Sar Ghan glided to where Jut Drir was playing with his deadly toys.

"Where are the radioactive materials?" Sar Ghan asked.

"They'll be here," said Jut Drir carelessly.

"The freighter is almost unloaded," Sar Ghan insisted. "Tih Plur said that there should be no delay."

"Don't worry," said Jut Drir, sighting on another peak.

Sar Ghan wandered back to the ship. The articles on the conveyor belt were getting farther apart and smaller. The corners of the hold were being drained.

"John Smith," he said. The nearest native stopped. "Where are the radioactive materials?"

"They are coming, noble master," the native said.

"The ship is almost unloaded. They should be here now."

"They will be here, noble master," said the native.

The last article came bouncing along the conveyor. Everything seemed to boil up in Sar Ghan; he turned in anger.

The small ships came gliding down through the air, soundlessly. They stopped by the end of the conveyor, and their doors swung open. Sar Ghan peered into one. It had no crew, no pilot. The natives gathered around and lifted out small metal boxes one by one; they seemed very heavy.

The boxes were set upon the conveyor. They were carried to the edge of the ship where they hesitated while a machine hovering over the belt darted a needle in and out of the valve at the top. Then they rumbled on into the ship.

SAR GHAN glided to the port and glanced at the indicator. The radioactive level was high, if anything. Sar Ghan looked up to find Jut Drir beside him.

"Everything all right?" Jut Drir asked.

"I suppose so," said Sar Ghan. His eyes followed Jut Drir's to the indicator.

Jut Drir vibrated satisfaction.

"Klast will welcome this load," he said.

"Yes," said Sar Ghan shortly.

Jut Drir looked at him curiously. "What's the matter with you?" he

asked. "You've been jumpy all day."

"Nothing," said Sar Ghan. "Something feels strange, I guess. I can't figure out what it is; it's like something is about to happen."

"The natives?"

"No," said Sar Ghan with amusement. "The natives are too stupid."

"You're just worried that you may have to leave Sol III," said Jut Drir. "You needn't. With results like these"—he indicated the boxes of radioactive materials streaming into the hold of the ship—"Klast will never replace us."

"I suppose you're right," said Sar Ghan.

The stream of incalculable wealth continued in a seemingly endless procession. But finally it was done. The ship was loaded; the conveyer was withdrawn; the port clanged shut. The huge freighter shivered for a moment on a pillar of flame and then shot upward. In a few minutes it was out of sight.

Sar Ghan and Jut Drir turned toward the warehouse. The natives were gone. So were their ships. But a few of the boxes were left, scattered along the conveyer and on the field. "No use worrying about them now," said Jut Drir. "I'll have the natives clear them up tomorrow."

They glided to the warehouse, where Jut Drir sealed the doors and fastened the intricate Dlar lock.

Sar Ghan turned once more to the deserted field before they left. As they walked away he shook himself.

WHEN JUT DRIR entered the council meeting his face was that peculiar livid color reserved by the Dlar for moments of great stress. A thrill of alarm swept the room in tingling vibrations.

"What is it, Jut Drir?" asked Tih Plur harshly.

For a moment the scientist couldn't speak. "The boxes—" he said finally and stopped.

"What about the boxes?" asked Bis Trok, alarmed.

Finally Jut Drir was able to pull himself together. "The boxes of radioactive materials that were left at the field yesterday—Sar Ghan, you remember."

Sar Ghan assented.

"Some were left on the conveyer," Jut Drir continued. "When I turned it on one of the boxes came to the testing device. Out of curiosity I glanced at the indicator; the radioactivity had decreased by half."

"Are you sure?" asked Sar Ghan.

"I tested them all," said Jut Drir. "All were at the same level."

There was a moment of silence while the information sank in. Tih Plur was the first to speak. "Could they have been defective?"

"I opened them up and conducted tests. Their half-lives were one day."

Kol Stom voiced the suspicions that were lurking in all of them.

"The natives?"

"Who else?" said Jut Drir. "It's obvious that they prepared artificial radioactives."

"Did you specify exactly what material to supply?" asked Tih Plur.

Jut Drir swayed nervously. "I didn't think they could use anything except natural radioactives for so high a radioactive level."

"You imply that there might have been deliberate treachery," said Sar Ghan. "That is impossible; I was there all day. There was excitement, pleasure at serving the Dlar, and something else—which was not something intended to harm the Dlar. It was exactly the opposite, only mixed up and hard to untangle."

"There's an easy way to settle this," said Tih Plur. "Call in the natives!"

The group trooped into the room and stood smiling before the Dlar.

"We have discovered," said Tih Plur "that the boxes of radioactive materials left at the field contained artificial radioactives with a half-life of only one day."

"Yes, noble master," the leader said, "that is true."

"Why did you use these instead of natural radioactives with a longer half-life?"

"We wished to please the noble master," said the leader.

"To please..." Tih Plur stopped and looked at Sar Ghan. The psychologist nodded.

"Why did you think this would please us?" asked Tih Plur evenly.

"You specified only materials of a certain radioactivity," said the leader. "Natural radioactives would have been too expensive. Instead we substituted manufactured products which made the trade balance more favorable."

"Trade balance!" exclaimed Tih Plur.

"Yes, noble master," said the native. "The machines you received yesterday would never have been worth their bulk in natural radioactives."

"You can go," Tih Plur said, dazed.

When the door had closed behind them, he turned to Sar Ghan.

"Well?" he said.

"Stupidity," said Sar Ghan. "Stupidity and nothing more. They sincerely believed they were being helpful. That was what I felt yesterday, that mingled feeling of sly helpfulness."

Tih Plur sighed. The room was silent once more.

"You realize what this means?" said Kol Stom.

"Don't we all?" asked Tih Plur savagely. "If the freighter arrives at Klast with a cargo of useless dross, the Leaders will think we have set ourselves as a rival government bent on defrauding them and threatening their authority. They will think we are going to use the weapons to build ourselves an empire."

"Everything will support that belief," said Sar Ghan gloomily. "We wouldn't let the crew of the ship leave or help with the loading; that will count against us."

BIS TROK was direct and ingenious, as always. "We can tell them it was the natives' fault."

Sar Ghan turned on him. "What are we going to do, radio the freighter to come back?"

"We could—" Bis Trok began.

"It would take a month for the ship to turn with the speed it has built up by now. The Leaders would strip us of everything for making a mistake like that; and even if we supplied them with a load of natural radioactives there would have to be an investigation."

"Just as there would be an investigation if we sent this story to Klast," said Tih Plur moodily. "Psychologists would arrive and confirm Sar Ghan's analysis that the natives are only willing slaves, doing what they are told, and the result would be the same in both cases. The Leaders would think we had reconsidered our plan and had arranged this flimsy story to get out of it."

Bis Trok was silenced. Everyone was silent. That was the situation; nothing could change it. "I have an idea," said Sar Ghan at last. He spoke slowly at first, but gradually, as he became more sure of himself, the words began to spill over themselves in their hurry to get out.

"We should radio the freighter that there is a terrible epidemic on Sol III and instruct them to dump their cargo for fear of its spreading among the Dlar. Then no one would ever know of the actual cargo."

"And we could spend the rest of our lives here," said Jut Drir hopelessly.

"No," said Tih Plur. "The Leaders would think that suspicious and would be bound to send an investigating party in time. We would have to leave, too. On our arrival at Klast we would be examined to see that we were not carrying the disease."

Sar Ghan's spirits fell as he realized the truth of Tih Plur's words. They would have to return to Klast. "It's the only hope," he said.

"And there's no time to lose. Jut Drir, send the message," said Tih Plur. "Outline the dreadfulness of the plague. The rest of us will have to get the ship ready for flight."

The remainder of the day was hectic. The natives hauled the necessary gear and supplies to the ship standing beside the administration building. Finally everything was ready.

"The captain finally agreed to dump the cargo," Jut Drir reported. "But only after I sent him details of the terrible carnage the epidemic was wreaking here."

One of the natives stepped forward as they were about to climb into their ship. "Noble masters," he

said in alarm. "Are you leaving us?"

Sadness swept from the natives to Sar Ghan.

"Yes," said Tih Plur curtly. "You'll have to get along without us."

Waves of sorrow beat at Sar Ghan's feelers. "The stupid slaves are sorry to lose their chains," Sar Ghan said bitterly. "They should have been more careful."

The ship rose in the air and hesitated. "What of the heavy weapons?" said Jut Drir.

"We had better destroy them," said Sar Ghan.

Tih Plur nodded and directed the ship toward the field. In a moment they were over it. In another the warehouse had disintegrated into shreds.

In that final moment before complete destruction, Sar Ghan thought he saw a glimpse of the interior. It looked empty. He needed rest, he

told himself; the lock could not have been opened.

They looked down once more before they turned on full power. Below the field was crowded with natives. Sar Ghan watched them making wild motions, strange leaps and jumps. It was one of their odd ways of expressing their sorrow he decided.

Let them be sad, he thought bitterly. Let them die of sadness. They had brought it on themselves.

Sar Ghan's friend turned up the heat control to keep out the terrible chill of Klast's winter.

"And yet?" he said.

"And yet I wonder," said Sar Ghan moodily, "I wonder if they were as stupid as we thought."

And he drained his glass.

THE END

**"There's no real Hope for us.
We're doomed. We'll go down
into oblivion and be forgotten
unless ..."**

*We are the old Enemy, you know,
the unhuman being that walks in
darkness and strives for possession of
man's world.*

But Kennedy and his kind didn't want conquest—they wanted a future for themselves, in peace with mankind. But an invisible barrier held them back from tomorrow!



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INCOMPLETE SUPERMAN

by Poul Anderson

Coming in our March issue!

AFTERTHOUGHT

by H. B. Fyfe

(illustration by Luros)

It looked like an ordinary jungle, understandable as a jungle although the vegetation was utterly strange. But there was something about it that made one forget little, important details . . .

LESS THAN an hour had passed since the Comet's SC-3 scout rocket had landed on the fifth planet of the small yellow star; but Jacques, the astrogator, had already wandered out of contact. Henry, the co-pilot, stood in the uneasy group around the exit port of the airlock sweating in the humid but breathable air of the strange world.

"I doubt you'll reach him on that, George," said Doc.

The pilot nodded resignedly and turned off the portable transmitter. Someone shifted his feet, and his boots made a sucking sound in the clinging mud thrown up by the landing.

"We must have a dead battery," said George. "No use trying to get him on the ship's set; he couldn't have gone that far."

"Probably fell over a cliff trying to snap a picture," muttered a voice from the rear of the group.

"Possible," said Henry. "He did take a camera along."

"Why did they give me a shutterbug for an astrogator?" complained George. "I suppose we'll have to look for him before we start anything else."

There was silence. Everyone had his own work to do, preparing to scour this planet. "I had better go," said Doc finally. "He may have hurt himself."

"That makes' one," said George. "About two more...?"

They broke it down so that Henry and Jeff, the assistant engineer, went with Doc, leaving George and Anton at the ship. Doc slung a first-aid kit over his shoulder and carried

a lightweight, collapsible stretcher. Seeing Jeff with the small radio, Henry contented himself with a canteen of water. On second thought, he picked up a hand blaster, remembering that from the air they had sighted a few birds or flying reptiles. Probably there was no other animal life, but...

None of them knew any nature lore, but Jacques' path was easy to follow at first. Someone had seen him head toward a clump of scrubby vegetation, bordering on the level, open landing place. The ground was covered by a short, reddish growth resembling a creeper more than a grass, and the missing man's boots had ground this into the spongy soil.

In a few minutes, they reached the "woods." From the air, they had appeared to cover about an acre. The growth was mostly purplish, fern-like bushes, a good deal taller than they had looked from a distance. There were many jumbled, multi-trunked trees with dark, fleshy leaves; and it was difficult to tell what connection these had with the black-and-red tangle of vines that wove through everything.

"Looks dark," said Doc, his pink face glum.

"Can't be anything there," said Henry. "Too quiet."

He was still hoping that was true when Doc startled him by letting out a whoop for Jacques. They listened for a moment but could hear no answer. "Aw, let's push on through this stuff," said Jeff.

He led the way, shoving the hanging vines aside. Doc went next with his stretcher, and Henry followed.



They were writhing feebly in the grip of... something...

WITHIN A few minutes, the co-pilot realized that they would never again find the trail they had been tracing. He glanced over his shoulder and found himself unsure of which way they had come. The floppy ferns smothered the view and his sense of direction was confused by the helter-skelter of vines and creepers.

"Hey! Where do you think you're going?" he called to Jeff.

"Cain't rightly tell," answered the engineer; "just fixin' to cut on through, if we kin."

"How is it?" asked Doc. "Getting thick?"

"I'll spell him," offered Henry.

They changed places, squeezing between Doc and a mass of damp ferns, and Henry took the lead. Before he had gone ten steps, he was confronted by a thick creeper, nearly waist high.

"Take the blaster to it," suggested Doc.

Henry gave the creeper a blast and was gratified by the sight of clear space for twenty feet.

"What was that?" demanded Jeff.

"Just a short blast," said Henry, peering ahead.

Beyond the clearing, the tangle seemed less dense.

"No, somethin' else," insisted Jeff. "Ah heard somethin' way back there—like a houn' dawg 'cross the valley."

"I heard nothing," said Doc. "When?"

"Just after he blasted that creeper half in two."

"What you heard, Jefferson," said Doc, "was an echo from the blaster. Come along!"

Henry pushed ahead. He could hear Jeff stubbornly arguing with Doc, but he paid little attention. He was sick of this tangled vegetation. He wondered if he were getting a case of nerves; perhaps he had been in space too long to feel comfortable under a sky.

He shook his head and plunged on through the ugly, purplish foliage, ignoring the thrashing efforts of the others to keep up. He cut through another thick creeper, and saw the blasted ends curl back with a shrinking motion suggestive of agony. He decided that he did not like this place.

"Why don't we go back?" he asked, stopping to mop his face with his sleeve. "All we're getting here is lost."

"We have to find Jacques if we can," said Doc.

"Yeah, go on ahead," mumbled Jeff.

"But we may be going in a circle by now, for all we know! What's the sense? Let's get back in the open and go around!"

"Can't be much further now," objected Doc in a tired voice.

"Gimme the blaster!" said Jeff impatiently. "Come on!"

"What makes you so hopped up?" demanded Henry.

Nevertheless, he surrendered the blaster and the lead as the engineer tossed the radio to him. He trailed along, daydreaming of the relief of reaching the other side of this jungle. Maybe, he thought, he ought to call George, to get a direction reading from the ship.

"Sure!" he told himself. "A couple of checks will tell us how we're heading. I must be thinking slow today."

He reached for the radio, and realized that it no longer hung from his shoulder. No longer?

"Damn!" he muttered. "I never picked it up when Jeff took the lead."

He looked at the other two, but decided not to call them. It was only a few steps back, and they were having enough trouble pushing through an especially tight tangle. He stumbled back, but the radio was hidden by the undergrowth.

He shrugged, and started after Doc and Jeff. They were still struggling to break through the tangle. "Can't remember what we were looking for," he muttered. "What's the matter with me?"

A SUDDEN shadow fell across his view. Crouching instinctively, he darted a glance upward. Two thrashing, interlocked bodies tore through the overhead vines. Henry had a glimpse of fluttering membranous wings, scaly bodies, and purplestained talons. The combatants thudded to the ground nearby.

The interruption altered the scene completely.

"Gawd!" breathed Henry.

It was like a blurred motion picture, suddenly focused.

He could see now that his companions were far from pushing through the foliage. Rather, they were writhing feebly in the grip of...something...that looked like a vine and held them well off the ground.

Another fleshy tendril snaked out to seize the fighting reptiles. One of these belatedly released his opponent and attempted to spread torn wings for escape. Other "vines" whipped about it, clinging and crushing. The flying thing emitted a hissing shriek, almost too high in pitch for Henry to hear. A cold shock jolted through the man.

"This whole place is alive!" he gasped.

There was daylight showing bright a few yards to his left. Without another thought, he charged through the damp ferns toward it, astonished at the speed his feet were suddenly able to make.

Surprisingly soon, he emerged onto the level plain where the SC-3 rested. The foggy, obsessed feeling was relieved by the sight of clear ground. He even dared to think back as he ran toward the ship.

Shame struggled with fear as he remembered the twitching bodies of Doc and Jeff, and he was glad that their faces had been turned away from his flight. There had been a dark, tendril-wrapped bundle, suspended like a cocoon a little beyond them. Jacques...?

"There was something else, too," he told himself. "Something spreading, and low against the ground... something that wouldn't let me look at it..."

That was it! He realized that the little jungle could not possibly have been as dense or as extensive as their eyes had seen it. *Something* had controlled their thoughts.

He had come out about a hundred yards from where they had entered the clump, so that he was approaching the ship from a new direction. Only when he had covered half the distance to the SC-3, streaming perspiration and not even daring to look over his shoulder, did the man standing by the airlock turn his

head. Then the figure raised one arm deliberately, pointing toward the purplish jungle.

Henry slowed to a brisk walk and glanced in the indicated direction. Another man was walking across the open space, about a hundred yards to his left. It looked like George.

He's going in on the same trail, thought Henry.

The pilot, though it may have been a trick of the moisture-laden air, seemed to be walking with a curiously stiff stride. He reached the edge of the tangle and disappeared within. Henry continued on toward the ship.

THE MAN by the airlock was Anton, the chief engineer. He wore a peculiar expression. "Did you find Jacques?" he asked in his clipped speech. "And the others—they are where?"

"They're back in the jungle," said Henry shortly. "Was that George I saw just now?"

"George, yes," said Anton, with a flat intonation that left the matter hanging in air, despite the conclusiveness of the words themselves.

"Just went off," he added. "Never to me a word. When I get out of here, he is too far to hear me shout, maybe."

Henry considered briefly. Whatever was in the jungle—or whatever was the jungle—its powers must be hypnotic to a high degree. George was as good as gone. He himself was lucky that a diversion had weakened

the grip on his own mind. In another minute or two, he would have been convinced that he had not wanted the radio at all. A thought struck him.

"I'll bet Jeff never got the blaster any more than I got the radio. What a shuffle!"

That left himself and Anton. They might make it back to the *Comet*—provided they dawdled no longer.

"Come on inside!" he ordered brusquely. "We'll blast off."

"And the others?"

"They won't be back; what's the matter, like it here?"

"No," said Anton flatly, following him inside the airlock. "I like it not at all. There is here something—"

"Yeah!"

"But—"

"They're dead, I tell you! If George isn't, yet, he will be soon."

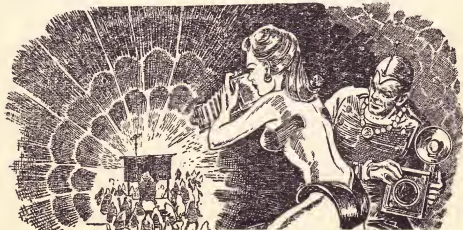
Anton turned on him a stolid blue stare, but obediently closed the port. They waited impatiently under the germicidal lights for the regulation time. Then the inner port opened.

"What was in the jungle?" Anton broke the uneasy silence.

"Later. Don't want to talk now. Get your eye on the gauges while I warm her up."

Henry half ran into the control room. He sat in the padded seat and strapped himself down, just in case.

When he was ready, he called Anton on the intercom, to warn him. There was no answer.



"Damn!" growled Henry.

When his fumbling fingers had pulled the buckles open, he leaped to the door and ran down the corridor. Sure enough, the airlock indicator showed the outer port open. He cursed and fidgeted until enough time had elapsed to permit his opening the inner door. Then he struggled briefly with the outer.

By the time he could see the surface, Anton was far beyond pursuit, moving at a shambling trot toward the clump of vegetation.

"I didn't think it had such a range," whispered Henry.

Hastily, he tried to analyze his thoughts. Was there any faint suggestion of alien probing?

There was no help for it. He would have to take off and trust that nothing in the rocket room needed adjusting. He had licked the damned thing once, but he might leave himself open-minded at the wrong instant. Above all, he had to warn the *Comet* about landing here.

He retreated into the airlock.

"Besides that," he muttered, waiting nervously for the inner port to open again, "little Henry is no plant food."

HE BLASTED off a few minutes later, angling sharply up.

"I'll worry about the course later," he thought. "What I need first is distance!"

He tried to pick up the *Comet* when he was about ten thousand miles up. Then again a little later. After his third try, he cut a tape for the automatic transmitter.

"Let's see," he murmured. "About every half hour? Better make it a twenty-minute interval, I guess."

He carefully adjusted the machine to send the message every twenty minutes, and returned to the controls. There was nothing for him to do until he got a bearing on the *Comet*, but it would be ironic if he missed a meteorite warning after all he had gone through.

"The damned tricky thing!" he reflected. "Took us one at a time. Jacques, then Doc and Jeff—probably the only reason I got away was

that three men and two dragons were a little too much at one time. Then George. As soon as he was under control, it called Anton over. Very methodical! Just get in line, gents! Was I ever lucky!"

But was he yet safe, he wondered? It seemed that there was something he had forgotten to do. Maybe he should check the rocket room, since he had had no report from Anton. He went aft and made a hasty inspection. All was in order.

He returned to the control room, still uneasy, and sat fingering the controls while he tried to remember anything he might have neglected.

The mood lingered.

There must be something, he thought.

He had too often seen "intuition" save lives in space to ignore that quiet nagging at the back of his mind. He had left a loose end somewhere. Should he again inspect the ship?

No, he preferred not to leave the controls. He would probably want to use them, if he decided to go back after any loose ends. That's what you had to do with loose ends. Go back and pick them up. Turn the ship and go back.

He reached out and brought a steering jet into action. The ship began to swing. As soon as he had the main tubes around some, he could head back. The gravitational field would help him; he need not decelerate very long. He was sure he could find the place again...

As the ship swung, he was pushed sideways. His gaze touched on the automatic transmitter he had set so carefully.

"Hot Sol!" he murmured. "I forgot to turn it on!"

Oh, well, it hardly mattered. It was more important that he concentrate on finding the place again. The thing in the ferns had told him when to come back, but somehow he had forgotten for a while. He was beginning to remember now, because it was time to remember, but meanwhile he had come all the way out here, like a fool...

THE END

The Barbarians

by William Morrison

"These people are not quite so primitive — those are robots."



(Illustration
by Murphy)

They were so far behind the times, these Hesperidian colonists, that it was a shame they had to be involved in Earth's war. But the Martians wanted to use Hesperides, too, so the little world had to be a battleground. But there was a difference here . . .

IT WAS A beautiful world, this Hesperides, planet of Sol's smaller brother sun, and under happier circumstances both Mal Ventner and his wife, Helen, would have enjoyed seeing it. They had landed on a vast rolling grassy plain from whose every direction the minor sun's rays sparkled, as if from heaps of emeralds. The oxygen content of the atmosphere was a trifle higher than that to which they were accus-

tomed, and this, together with the low gravity—the planet itself was only half the mass of the earth—combined to give them a feeling of exhilaration. But as Mal stood gazing beside the hundred-foot space ship which had brought him to Hesperides, a sudden feeling of numbness seized him. Fortunately, the sensation was only momentary; when it had passed, he plunged into the ship and shut the door.

His wife's gaze fell on his face inquiringly. "An electro-sonic ray swept over me," he explained. "I think we had better stay inside here, where we're safe."

A needle of light leaped into existence at the top of the instrument panel, and then a second needle at the bottom. Helen powdered her nose calmly with a spray puff that she wore as a ring on her little finger, and observed, "We seem to be getting it from both sides. There's no doubt that a war is going on."

"Trust us to settle down cosily in No Man's Land," said Mal. The ship trembled slightly as a beam of energy smashed against it. He muttered, "I wonder which side is ours. It would be sad to find ourselves put out of commission by our own allies."

The instrument panel was glowing steadily now as energized rays of all sorts swept over the ship and kept increasing in intensity. Helen remarked, "I thought you said we'd be safe in here."

"Well, the weapons these people have are rather primitive, and our ship is armor-plated, but it hardly pays to take chances. I think we'd better dig in."

He touched a stud, and the ship began to wallow from side to side, like an ancient sailing vessel in a heavy sea. The earth sank away beneath them, and soon the rays of energy ceased to affect the indicators. Helen said gloomily, "Now we can return to our role of innocent bystanders, and watch these people kill each other off. Why are wars necessary, anyway?"

"Our job," Mal replied, "is not to worry about that, but to report what happens. We weren't sent as special

correspondents all the way from Earth simply to get excited about why people fight." He was studying a screen on which was spread a panorama of the grassy plain above them. "There seems to be an attack developing."

FAR OFF to one side of the screen, tiny figures had become visible. They advanced slowly, taking advantage of every minor hill and valley to seek shelter from the sweeping energy rays. Mal muttered, "It can't be—no, of course not. I thought for a moment that they were men. But these people are not quite so primitive as all that; those are robots advancing."

The robots were carrying heat-guns, and the atmosphere above the plain began to shimmer as the guns came into play, carving out paths of air of lower refractive index. Helen said, "What do you suppose is their objective?"

"Probably the enemy's heavy ray-artillery. But, Good Lord, they'll never get anywhere that way."

The robots had begun to fall. They would suddenly move with erratic steps, come to a full stop, and then collapse altogether, a tangle of molten and twisted metal. But those that remained unhit continued to advance.

The air on the other side of the plain became gradually hazy, tinged with a faint pink, and began to move slowly to meet the advancing robots. The paths of the energy-beams, when they hit this cloud, became confused, and were quickly lost from sight. But the robots, those that survived the raying they had received, trudged forward unfalteringly. It was not until the edge of the cloud reached them that they showed signs of hesitation. But by this time it was too late. The pinkish gas enveloped them, and they began to creak, and then to drop. Only a scant dozen out of several thousand managed to reverse their direction in sufficient time to escape, and reach their own lines.

Mal stared at Helen. "They won't believe us back on Earth when we report this. A corrosive cloud, elec-

trically directed. How many years ago was that supposed to have gone out of use?"

"About a hundred thousand."

"A hundred thousand. And these people still seem to regard it as the last word in modern weapons."

"They've been out of contact with Earth all that time," Helen pointed out. "It's only in the last few months that we've managed to get in touch with them once more. They've had no opportunity to learn of what has gone on since they left."



She and Mal thought back to the time when Hesperides had first come into human ken. There had been the sudden flaring up of a Nova on the rim of the Solar System itself, at a distance equal to several times the major axis of Pluto's orbit. After the first period of extraordinary brightness, the Nova had partially subsided, and become apparently stabilized as a star of the minus first magnitude.

Further observation had shown that it was responsive to the Sun's gravitational pull, and eventually its orbit had been definitely determined as an extremely eccentric ellipse. At the moment of discovery, it was a trifle more than the minimum distance from the Sun, the focus of the ellipse.

An exploratory scientific expedition had discovered that about this Sol Novus, itself a planet in relation to the Sun, revolved a lifeless Satellite, Hesperides, that seemed to offer remarkable opportunities for human colonization. There was a suitable atmosphere, low gravity, and an average temperature that compared very favorably with that of Earth's temperate zones, for Sol Novus, not as bright as the major Sun, was only fifty million miles away from Hesperides. In addition, the planet's axis of rotation was so inclined to the plane of its own ellipse about Sol Novus that extremes of climate were no greater than on Earth.

COLONIES had immediately been sent out. But Earth had not been alone in its discovery that Hesperides offered a suitable abode for life. Mars, too, had reached the same conclusion, and Martian colonies were established within a few months after those of Earth. As at that time there was peace between the two planets, the new inhabitants of Hesperides had lived on terms of good will with each other.

These early settlers had been furnished not only with complete sets of mechanical equipment, but with an assortment of flora and fauna that were considered specially desirable for the new planet. Even the varieties of microscopic life—the bacteria, the yeasts, the molds, the protozoa—all had been chosen carefully. And from the reports that reached the home planets of Earth and Mars, the resultant existence on Hesperides had been like living in a paradise.

After only a thousand years, however, Sol Novus, together with Hesperides, swung so far out away from the Sun, that connections with Earth and Mars became difficult, and were finally lost. For another thousand centuries its civilization developed out of contact with the parent planets. And now, when it was once more close enough for communication with the inner members of the Solar System, it was to find a universe at war.

For ten years now, Earth and Mars had been pecking away at each other

at long range. The direct physical damage had been slight, but communications with other planets had been cut, and both Earth and Mars had been left in an unpleasant state of isolation. The one place where the two opposing powers could attack each other from convenient bases had been on Hesperides. When that planet had come close enough to be informed of what was going on, both the Martian and the Earth colonies had been commanded to enter the conflict.

It was to report on how the Terrestrial colony was obeying orders that Mal and his wife had been sent here. So far, everything they had seen had indicated that the weapons on both sides were so primitive that Earth had little either to hope or to fear from whatever happened on Hesperides.

Mal swept the battlefield with a scanning ray until he located a fallen robot. He brought the robot into focus on a small screen, and then there became slowly visible something they had not previously been able to see. On the metallic breast and forehead were stamped green circles, filled in with green and bluish areas. Mal cried excitedly, "The Earth's insignia! They're our own! Helen, we were the ones who lost that attack!"

"We may be down, but we're never out," she returned. "Here we come again."

One glance at the larger screen was enough to show that the Earth's robots were returning to the attack. There seemed to be just as many of them this time as before, so that it was evident that there was no lack of replacements, but the advance seemed a trifle slower and more cautious. It was several seconds before Mal noticed that about each robot there was an extremely faint aura of yellow light.

Evidently, the Martians, having had such great luck with their corrosive cloud on the first occasion, counted on using the same weapon again with equal success. The pink haze swept down on the robots and enveloped them so that they were almost lost from sight. But the robots

did not fall. The aura of yellow light dissipated the corrosive substance, and the robots continued their advance. The cloud drove onward, and was slowly lost in the distance.

Now the rays of the energy-beams swept the battlefield once more, to be met by answering rays from the Martians. An occasional robot fell, without affecting the rest of his comrades in the least. After a time, the answering rays from the Martian side became fewer in number, and more feeble in intensity. Either the Martians were retreating, or some of their guns had been put out of commission.

WHEN the robots stopped advancing, and settled down on what appeared to be a fixed position. Mal said, "There isn't going to be a great deal more action here. Perhaps we'd better get moving."

"Perhaps," agreed Helen, and unexpectedly, they did move. The ship jerked suddenly to one side, and then began to slither slowly backward. Before Mal could collect his wits, a series of unpleasant shocks ran through the ship.

Helen laughed until the tears ran down her face. "We're being attacked by a Martian burrowing tank. How incredibly old-fashioned! To think that these people still go in for underground warfare!"

"Laugh if you please, but those explosions aren't very pleasant," grumbled Mal. "Shall we put the fellow out of his misery?"

"No, let's not take sides in the fighting. We're supposed to be observers only. Let's get up in the air, where we can get an idea of everything that's going on."

As the ship lifted out of the ground, Mal could see the robots lift their heads and stare after it. The first movement of their heat-guns came to a quick stop as they caught sight of the green and blue Earth insignia on its sides. Then the ship was up out of their range, and they returned to their task of digging in and setting up detector instruments that would inform them of the first signs of any counter-attack.

On the ground, the Martians ap-

peared to be satisfied to maintain their present positions. But in the air, they were launching an attack in full force. Helen was the first to catch sight of their distant rocket-ships, blasting ahead slowly at what seemed to be no more than five hundred miles an hour.

"Bombers," she said. "With only a few fighting planes. "And Mal—that face—"

Mal had centered his telescope screen on a single plane. In the driver's seat was a powerful squat figure. The figure's face was red and horribly ugly, with two enormous eyes, a huge slit of a mouth, and a square, unpleasant determined jaw.

Helen whispered, "I don't think Martians are good-looking even at their best. But evolution on Hesperides has certainly done nothing to make them more beautiful." She shuddered. "He can't harm us, but all the same, he frightens me."

It required several seconds for them to realize that the plane was heading straight for them. The driver had caught sight of their Earth insignia, and they could see the contortions of his face as his guns began spitting rays and chemicals at the ship. He seemed to be puzzled at seeing them sail along unhurt, for he swooped under them,

and then came back to renew his attack. Helen asked, "Do you think that perhaps we could give him a dose of his own medicine—"

Mal shook his head. "He doesn't seem able to hurt us. Let's wait. I'm curious to see what he'll do."

The driver's enormous eyes glowed as his guns emptied without doing them the slightest damage. Suddenly, he changed his tactics. Instead of circling to avoid a collision, he dived straight at them. He hit them full speed, almost turning them over before they could right themselves, and then the remains of his plane plummeted to the ground.

"He had courage, that boy," said Mal admiringly. "He figured that ours was a more deadly fighting machine than his own, and he was willing to destroy himself if he could get us in the process."

"A barbarous sort of courage," replied Helen.

They were being attacked again. A formation of five planes was making straight for them, and the shock of five explosive waves beating simultaneously on their ship sent them both staggering. Mal said glumly. "Those fellows are beginning to be annoying. "I'm tempted to take your advice about giving them a dose of their own medicine."



A SQUADRON of defense planes was approaching rapidly. The Martian attackers gave up the space ship as a bad job, and turned to defend their own bombers. In a moment, the sky was full of dogfighting groups, spitting and barking viciously at each other. The defensive armor, both Mal and Helen noticed, seemed to be greatly inferior to the weapons of offense. The fights lasted no more than a few seconds each before one or more planes broke away and dived for the ground. And wherever possible, a defeated pilot crashed into his victorious opponent, attempting to take his enemy down with him.

"Our men are just as brave as theirs," pointed out Mal. "And just as barbarous. I'm afraid you've no grounds for feeling superior, Helen."

The Martian bombers, their loads of chemicals and explosives emptied on Earth's territory, had turned and were making for home, their fighting planes attempting to shield them in a desperate rear-guard struggle. Helen sighed, "Well, that's about over. Don't you think, Mal, that it's about time we made for Earth headquarters, and got in contact with our own leaders?"

Mal nodded, and turned the ship in the opposite direction from that in which the bombers and their escorts were travelling. Several Earth planes approached them and hovered about suspiciously for a few seconds before noticing their blue-green insignia and leaving them alone. Then the noise of the fighting died away behind them, and they sailed on peacefully, the humming of their own motors the only thing to reach their ears.

It was growing dark now as Sol Novus set beneath the eastern horizon. Twenty miles ahead of them, and almost four miles below, they could see the lights of an Earth city beginning to appear in the dusk. In the sky, the major sun was just becoming visible as the faintest of stars, and the familiar constellations that they had last seen from Earth's southern hemisphere began

to spring dimly into view, their shape unaltered.

They watched the city becoming larger before them. The buildings were neither exceptionally large nor particularly beautiful, and once again Mal and Helen were conscious of a feeling of disappointment at the low level which civilization on Hesperides seemed to have attained. Isolation from Earth and Mars had apparently not done the colonists any good.

Mal looked questioningly at his wife. "Shall we descend here, or go further on into our own territory?"

"I'm in favor of going on and looking for something better. This hardly resembles a capital city, and we might get tied up in a lot of red tape with some minor officials."

Mal nodded. "The building in the center seems—"

And then there was no building in the center of the town.

The walls and the roof separated from each other with an apparent gentleness that was startling, and disappeared in a blaze of light. All over the city the squat ugly buildings were disappearing in the same manner. Helen stared at her startled husband, and heard him mutter, "The explosion wave won't do us any good. We'd better get away." He pulled a lever, and the ship rocketed up with a speed that left the destroyed city in a few seconds more than thirty miles beneath them. Then he came to a stop, and almost three minutes later, the first noise of the explosions reached them, faint and dimly menacing, like the growl of a beast whose victims had escaped him.

Before the noise of the last explosion had died away, the city was in darkness once more, a darkness that this time was complete, with no winking points of light to break its sway. They swung down slowly to investigate what had happened. Mal said, "If there had been an air fleet dropping bombs from high altitudes, our instruments would have registered. And besides, the accuracy of aim would appear to rule that out. I suppose the Martians used their tunneling tanks to mine the city."

WITHOUT saying anything in return, Helen trembled. A beam of light from their ship swept over the devastated city and revealed complete death. There was not the slightest indication of a living human being, of the smallest animal, of a moving robot. Everything that was combustible seemed to have gone in the first explosion, so that nowhere was there a sign of even an inanimate flame. It was as if the city had been in ruins for ages.

Helen said in a low voice, "Even on Earth at its worst, there's never been anything like this. These people don't appear to be able to build very well, but they can certainly kill and destroy. Perhaps it's fortunate that they have no better weapons than we've seen them use."

Mal commented, "They kill at our orders. Don't forget that this is our war, not theirs. Shall we look for another city?"

Helen nodded, and their ship rose again and drove on. Now there came to them the sight of a cluster of lights much greater in extent than the one that had been destroyed. They were pleased to see that the architecture of this town was of a superior order. The buildings were larger, more graceful, of more beautiful material. And the city itself was more alive. Their instruments detected a steady hum that rose from it, the hum of innumerable human voices blended into one low sound.

A search beam picked them out of the sky as they approached, the light dancing meaningfully for a few seconds on their Earth insignia. Then it was shut off, and a glowing tube on the instrument panel indicated a radio beam. Mal tuned in and a man's voice spoke to them in Earth's language, in words that had remained unchanged for a thousand centuries, but with the faintest indication of a foreign accent.

"Calling Earth ship."

"Earth ship replying. We are special representatives sent to secure information on progress of war. You have been informed of our coming. We want to meet Earth Colony's president."

A girl's voice said, "One moment, please. We are making connections to the president."

It was only a few seconds later that the president spoke to them. "Will you please radio your images, and the images of your credentials."

Mal turned on the television sender, and there was a moment's pause while the president scanned their credentials. Then he said, "You will find a landing field to the north of the city. An official delegation will meet you there. Welcome to Hesperides, Mr. and Mrs. Ventner."

Mal turned off the television sender, and grinned at the old-fashioned courtesy. The landing field turned out to be five times as large as was needed, and he noticed the admiring glances from the official delegation as they watched what seemed to them a skillful landing. Evidently, they were accustomed to the automatic landing devices that every Earth ship now possessed.

THE PRESIDENT was a tall man, with a very grave expression, and a very ugly face that Helen found charming. Except for his clothes, which had undergone countless years of development different from those of Earth, and consequently appeared to be several months out of date, he could have passed for an inhabitant of Earth itself. Whatever changes evolution on Hesperides had caused in the Martians, it had not done any harm to the descendants of Earthmen.

Mal asked anxiously, "Will our ship be safe here? Just an hour or so ago, we saw a Martian attack—"

The president smiled. "The ship will be perfectly safe. We are hardly in the same position here as we were in New Carthage."

The official delegation was presented to them. The gallant manners of the men pleased Helen more than she was willing to admit, but later she did whisper to Mal, "If these people here are barbarians, at least they're charming ones."

He smiled back at her vaguely. He was listening to the president's daughter describing the latest play, and Helen could see that he was at

least as much interested in looking at the girl as in understanding what she was saying. Even when these Earth colonists were ugly, thought Helen, as was the president, they remained paradoxically handsome. And when their features were regular, as were those of his daughter—If she hadn't known Mal so well she would have been jealous.

Before discussing the business that had brought them there on such a long journey, they were to be shown the city. Mal and Helen watched intently as the president guided them through the public squares, pointed out the film libraries, described the places of amusement. Everything they saw seemed to be in perfect taste, conceived with as excellent judgment as anything on Earth itself, and carried out without a flaw. The ugliness of that destroyed city or New Carthage began to be a mystery.

When they had finally beheld all the more important features of the city, it was too late to discuss the war. They were shown to an apartment of their own, with robot servants to care for their every need. Helen said thoughtfully, "They're barbarians, of course. They're much behind us in science, and they're absolutely ferocious in battle. But not all their attention has gone to learning how to destroy. They're charming!"

"That's the sort of thing that would impress a woman."

"And the girls are beautiful. But I don't suppose that sort of thing would impress a man."

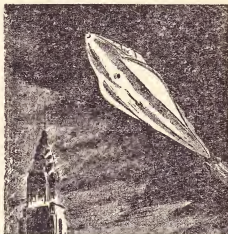
"I think," said Mal absently, "that it's about time to go to sleep."

In the morning, they breakfasted with the president, without once touching on the subject that had brought them to Hesperides. It was not until the breakfast dishes had been removed and dissolved in a current of superheated steam that their discussion became serious. The president said, "I must confess that although we are more than holding our own, we can not exactly claim to be winning the war."

Mal asked, "How do your forces compare with those of the enemy?"

"We have a population of some two hundred and twenty millions against his two hundred forty-five. On the other hand, our industry is somewhat better organized, and our robots are of slightly superior design. The net result is that we are about even."

H ELEN SAID, "I am interested, Mr. President, in knowing what the relative losses have been."



"Ah, the losses. They have been exceptionally high on both sides, slightly higher on the side of the enemy, though, I am happy to say. We have had only five cities destroyed as against his seven. We have practically ruined his aircraft and robot industries. It is true that we have only about ten per cent of our own industries left," he added with a smile. "As for losses in instruments of war, I don't have the figures at hand but I can secure them for you very easily. I do remember that we have lost more than fifteen million robots of one kind or another as against the enemy's sixteen. Over eighty per cent of ours were of the cheap Type C. But almost forty per cent of his were of more expensive types."

"I'm not referring to losses in material, Mr. President," explained Helen patiently. "I'm curious to know what your losses are in terms of human beings."

"I'm afraid I don't understand."

"How many men, women, and children have been killed?"

The president lifted his eyebrows. "Why, none, of course."

Mal interrupted. "We're not joking, Mr. President. We'd like to know what you casualties are."

The president stared at them. "Good Lord, do you mean to tell me that in your wars, people actually get killed?"

"I thought," replied Helen weakly, "that was one of the purposes of a war."

"Not at all. A war is fought to determine which of two groups is the stronger. Modern science being what it is, strength is determined mainly by the reserves of men and materials. We test our men by their ability to produce materials, and we test the materials by their behavior in actual fighting. As we have robots to operate our weapons for us, there is no need whatever to kill human beings. We fight until one side is clearly on the point of exhausting its materials, and victory appears certain for the other. We then arrange peace."

"And there are never any casualties?"

"It's bad enough to waste so many million dollars' worth of robots and valuable machines. It would be inexcusable to waste human lives."

Mal said, "We saw a city destroyed."

"New Carthage. A city without life. All the cities in the battle zone are operated purely by robots for the manufacture of war materials. Their destruction never harms any one."

Helen objected, "But you have human aviators."

The president smiled. "You must have seen the Martian robot flyers. They were designed by a man with a sense of humor, and at a distance seem fairly human. But they are completely inanimate affairs."

THERE was an embarrassed silence. Neither Mal nor Helen could meet the president's eye. Mal said finally, "I need hardly tell you, Mr. President, how pleased we are that you have suffered no casualties. But I feel that our generals back home will hardly be satisfied. They will be under the impression that

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you are not putting forth your best efforts."

The president returned heatedly, "This war has already dislocated our entire economic life. If you feel—"

Mal shook his head. "You misunderstand me, Mr. President. What I have given you is not my personal opinion, but the opinion my superiors will undoubtedly express. I am afraid you will have a difficult time convincing them they are wrong."

The president demanded, "Am I to have my people slaughtered merely to satisfy them that I am in earnest?"

Helen started. "What an excellent idea!"

They turned to look at her. She went on rapidly, "Why not lay out special cemeteries? You can have several million tombstones inscribed with the names of both Earth men and Martians. Of course, there need be no bodies under the tombstones, but our superiors will never know that. The tombstones alone will be enough to satisfy them."

Both men burst out laughing.

(This story has been reprinted by popular request.)

Helen flushed. "If you don't think the idea is a good one, I'd like to hear of something better!"

The president said soothingly, "It's an excellent idea. Only—" Then he looked at Mal again, and they burst once more into laughter. This time Helen joined them.

They left Hesperides a week later. The Martians had been informed of the necessity of constructing cemeteries, and a short truce had been declared for the purpose. As Mal and Helen took off from the airport at which they had landed, they looked back longingly. The beautiful city was shrinking away below them, and far off, the green fields that covered so large a portion of the planet were becoming visible again. The scene was so breath-taking in its beauty, that for a long moment they remained silent, looking down. Helen murmured, "What charming people!"

"Yes, but a war in which no one is killed—" Mal smiled. "What barbarians!"

Did you think the cover was better than last issue's?

as good as last issue's? not as good?

Did you think the artwork was better than last issue's?

as good as last issue's? not as good?

Did you find the stories better than last issue's?

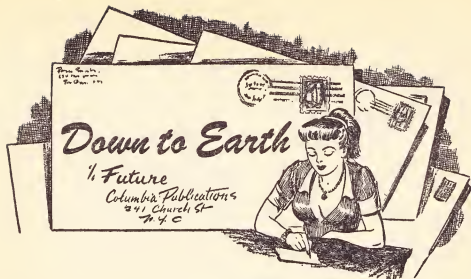
as good as last issue's? not as good?

Were there any stories in this issue you did not like?

Are you in favor of our continuing reprints of short stories from old issues of Future, etc?

Yes No

Which letter in "Down to Earth" did you find most interesting? (Name of the letter-writer.)



This department is for you, the readers, where you can discuss science and science fictional subjects in general, and your opinions of *Future* in particular. We will pay two dollars for each letter published, regardless of length.

Dear Sir:

Perhaps the reason I keep palming over two bits for each copy of *Future* that appears on the local newsstand lies in the hope that it'll steadily grow into maturity. Presently, though, it's still a babe in the woods of science fiction, and its growth would look much more encouraging if, instead of using two feature novels and one novelet in each issue, you used only one, devoting more space to short stories.

However, though I prefer the short stories, I've found that the longer ones are better written and interest-provoking. This is a hard thing for me to say, but casting emotional prejudice aside, it's the truth. Such authors as L. Sprague de Camp and Poul Anderson know their stuff and are best in the novel field. But why use two in one issue? The sixty or more pages devoted to the two novels could have been used up by six short stories, giving newer science fiction writers a break.

Memo to Robert F. Peck: In the September issue of *Future*, you mention that you are a psychologist and then go on to relate how you read for the sheer enjoyment of it, but find the "destructive theme" in science fiction disturbing. Now I, too, am versed in psychology and was

surprised to see how you could miss the reason for the often recurring "destructive theme" in literature.

Most of us definitely need an emotional outlet. Society and conventional behaviour prevent us from displaying our aggressive behaviour openly. It is repressed, showing itself in other manifestations of human conduct. The author sublimates his destructive tendencies in his work by having the protagonist achieve his means through violence, brutality, vengeance, etc. He has chosen a positive outlet. And in this he is *en rapport* with the reader who, in imagination, takes out his "wish thoughts" against those he dislikes by reading literature with the "destructive theme".

This kind of writing serves both the sadist and the masochist; the former, who takes pleasure in hurting others (but restrains this impulse because of conventional breeding) and the latter who takes *unconscious* pleasure in being hurt. Now what would happen if these people no longer had an outlet, such as science fiction provides? Probably many of them would be in jails and what not! No... if the "destructive theme" were abolished in literature, these people would have to seek their release elsewhere. And where is that? How? Undoubtedly in ways pun-



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**Headliners in our
March issue**



**INCOMPLETE
SUPERMAN**

by Poul Anderson

*A Gripping Feature Novel
by the author of
"The Long Return"*



AGE OF PROPHECY

by Margaret St.
Clair

*An absorbing Novel
of condemned Science*

ished by law. It's better for them to take their ill-will out on the characters of a story than on those in real life.

My favorite story in last issue was "Flight From Tomorrow" by H. Beam Piper. I would like to see some more of this author's fascinatingly imaginative stories. "Wide-Open Planet", by L. Sprague de Camp, reminded me of one long soap-opera continuously running as if in real life. But here it was collected into an effective novel. Next in choice comes "The Long Return", by Poul Anderson, and a tie between the two short stories by C. M. Korblyth and Morton Klass.

Despite *Future's* faults, it more than makes up for them in the fact that it's still young and has carried some really good pieces in its first three issues. Will be hoping to see short feature science-fiction articles and filler poems. This always breaks up the pages in an effect pleasing to the eyes. Yes...I'll keep on buying *Future* for I know it will live up to its title. Your past is the present to your *Future*.

—Leo Louis Martello, *Handwriting Psychologist*, 9 Hook Street, Southbridge, Massachusetts.

(Your statement on the function of the "destructive" element in fiction seems to be the generally accepted opinion, but the point is still moot, as a lawyer might say.)

Dear Sirs:

Here's hoping you don't mind too much getting the female viewpoint, cause if there's one thing fem science fiction fans prefer, it's giving an opinion, invited or not. One explicit compliment I would like to convey is the obvious fact that *Future* is exactly what it claims to be—science fiction, a perfect blend of the inexplicable explained and embellished, the whole garnished with a bit of garlic like action, a few delectable facts, and served up in a compact fashion.

Being female, I'd like a bit more romance in your stories, not the semi-frustration stuff Mr. L. Sprague de Camp puts forth. I adore Finlay's illustrations for the practical reason that they illustrate, and beautifully, too. I like my tension physical, and disliked "The Long Return" because the darned thing had a distinct odor of

[Turn To Page 88]

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the old condemned "Aunt in Australia" solution, albeit the darned thing was mental.

I adored "Wide-Open Planet". Borel is so darned believable and typically Terran. Please give us a female adventurer a la Borel...could be an innovation.

I wish you'd let in some of us poor poets. There isn't a decent field open for science fiction or fantasy poetry anywhere, and it's almost impossible not to write it, even though I know I should be turning out these little gems that bring the so-slim checks.

Please explain one thing for my son, a teen-ager, and myself. Why do illustrators conceive of space as a place where it's oh so cold and unbreathable that all males wear padded space suits, complete with helmets, while the beautiful babes with blasters on their sides wear practically nothing?

—Marjorie Mead, 959 South York, Denver 9, Colorado.

(Covers are designed to arouse interest in the book, not to impart scientific facts. Thus, the artists draw what art departments tell them to, and are not responsible for romanticized, bathing-beauty space scenes. You can blame the artist if you think the cover isn't well drawn, of course. Personally, I thought the July cover was a lovely job, and maintain that it had the spirit, if not the letter of science fiction.)

Dear RWL:

My second letter to your magazine, mayhap my last. (Oh well, you don't publish 'em, anyhow...)

Very much appreciate the Finlay in this issue. (September.)

Sorry I can't say as much for Bergey.

I still steadfastly refuse to "rate" stories, as I feel such opinions are so highly subjective that my own tendency to "display" is insufficient cause for waxing vocal (or is the term "literal"?) on the subject.

Primarily, I should like to ask the Editor why he captions R.F. Peck's letter, "The gentleman has a point worth considering."

Although I'm sure that Mr. Peck is an adequate judge of human motives, and he obviously knows how to "classify" symptoms, does not RWL discern the error in RFP's letter?

Judging from the movie marquees, magazine titles, pseudo-comic magazine matter,

and such, the market for "I'm better'n you and have a nastier weapon to prove it!"—not too much differentiated from our own "news" headlines—may be evidential of paranoid aberrations. But since such is the demand and taste of the public-at-large (please note the subtle double-entendre), are we not committing a gross error in assuming that the grist from the writers' mills is the disease, or disturbing factor?

Personally, I feel (and this is the basis upon which I operate, as a consultant in personality-problems) that so long as symptoms are substituted for originating ailments in our computations, we will continue to fall short of the goal we ultimately seek.

The buyers' demand for such fiction is only indicative of the underlying aberration on the individual level (and may be partially explanatory of the social and national levels of war-drumming), and as such provides a market-for-sale of the pulp-publisher's product.

While creative, constructive fiction is wonderously relaxing to a large minority, the majority rule indicates blood-letting, murder-by-science, psychopathic gun-law, and mental morbidity as the best way to make out fastest in the publishing field.

So why not, Mr. Peck, continue to pursue science fiction as a subjectively-satisfying thing, choosing the constructive material to be found therein, and seek within *Man-the-individual*, and *Man-the-race* the underlying causes of that which is less-than-sapient?

In which line, you (and possibly RWL, too) may find interest in the tub being very effectively thumped by our mutual friends L. Ron Hubbard and J. W. Campbell, Jr., in the editorials and article sections of recent issues of *Astounding*, and through the medium of Hubbard's very very erudite book, "Dianetics".

—Robin leRoy, 1504 Grove Avenue, Richmond, Virginia.

(Tsk, Brother leRoy, you see—you despaired too soon. Recall the tale of Robert Bruce and the spider. Your letter was published.

Appreciating Bergey in the September issue would have been difficult for any admirer of his—that includes myself—because he didn't appear anywhere in this issue.

[Turn Page]

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You yourself have answered the question why I placed the caption I did on Mr. Peck's letter; you found the point worth considering—enough so to write a letter. Which is all I stated; I didn't say I agreed with it, or that anyone else should—merely that the point itself was worth considering. It so happens that I do agree with Mr. Peck in part, and with your notes, in part. Particularly do I agree that treating symptoms of any sickness is a self-defeating process—and it is on these grounds, among others, that I find dianetics unacceptable, inasmuch as it has offered no proof to substantiate its claims. It claims to be a science, but there are no basic formulae presented in the book—or anywhere else, so far as I have heard—but only statistics of "cures", which mean nothing and prove nothing in this framework. It's value as a therapeutic art—well, it has long been established that just about anything will help almost anyone, more or less, if it is believed in. However, the point to be made here is that dianetics has made definite and positive claims, and the burden of proof rests upon the dianetics, not upon the people who question them. So far, there has been no proof.)

Dear Sir:

I intend, in this letter, to comment on your magazine. I may add that I hope to see the letter published sometime in the near future.

I will naturally begin with a comparative rating of the stories.

1. "The Long Return", by Poul Anderson. Anderson's preoccupation with intercultural conflicts continues, with perhaps more effect in this story than in any of his others, except for the recent "Helping Hand". However, I would prefer a less heroic approach. Somehow, important futuristic happenings seem more interesting (fictionally) when filtered through layers of prejudice and misinformation to the moron-in-the-jetcar-in-the-street, much as Conrad filtered his personally important narrations through a multitude of narrators.

2. "Wide-Open Planet", by L. Sprague de Camp. This is, aside from what the "Queen of Zamba" would have been if its second part hadn't been so dismally disappointing, the best to date of the Krishnan stories. One thing that bothers me is why the general level of these stories has been so dismally low. It isn't the idea, which is excellent, and I am beginning to suspect that the fault, Dear Brutus, is not in de Stars but in de Camp. Come to think of it, only two of his stories have been en-

[Turn To Page 92]

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tirely successful ("Lest Darkness Fall" and "None But Lucifer"—the latter reads as if it had been written largely by H. L. Gold, since it bears few marks of de Camp's individual style), and neither of them is predominantly humorous. In almost all of his other stories, he ends in a whirl of action which both prolongs the story and prevents it from reaching any real conclusion. And occasionally, in such a failure as "The Reluctant Shaman", this whirling finale occupies the whole story.

3. "Flight From Tomorrow", by H. Beam Piper. The futureman's misunderstanding and disgust at an unfamiliar epoch are very well drawn, and this might have gone higher if both the character and the epoch-drawing (of Hradzka's own epoch, that is) had not been so superficial.

4. "Iteration", by C. M. Kornbluth. Ingenious, but largely spoiled by first-person narration, over-technicality, and the vagueness of the savagery-refuge from which it is told.

5. "Invitation From the Stars", by Morton Klass. This is well-written, but the alien is altogether fantastic. Until any kind of work becomes unnecessary through increasing mechanization, competitiveness will remain a *personal* survival trait. And we are built for personal survival, as all life must be. It is with a high degree of intelligence and weapon-development that competitiveness becomes anti-race-survival. It therefore seems likely that even the most highly developed non-human races (if any exist) would be competitive, as we.

I am considerably disheartened by the forecast of a novel by George O. Smith in the next issue, since this author is a consistent last-placer for me, as are the other two Smiths of science fiction—E. E., Ph. D. and Clark Ashton.

I will conclude with some suggestions for your magazine's improvement. Print the magazine on better paper, or at least those pages containing illustrations. Either stop calling your feature stories "novels", or print real novels. Print more letters. Print more fiction. Print articles on science, especially on biology and the history of science. Elevate the covers and the advertisements. Of course, I realize, that this would involve raising the price of the magazine. But, as E. P. Boyko pointed out,

[Turn To Page 94]



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quality matters more than price in science fiction.

—Michael Wigodsky, 402 West Clay, Houston 6, Texas.

(Unfortunately, many of your suggestions, irrespective of their merit, are not within the editor's province. We have been forced to raise the price of *Future*, due to skyrocketing production costs, but are still trying to offer a lower-priced magazine. Obviously, we cannot give you as large a one as the more expensive books—and just as obviously, if we print more letters, and include science articles, there will be just that much space less for story content. *Everyone*, it turns out, didn't like the original fifteen-cent price—later returns showed that some felt that a larger book, selling for twenty-five cents or more be better—but an overwhelming majority of letters received on the first issues favored the lower price. So far as calling the longer stories "feature novels" goes, this has become an established pulp magazine practice—so much so that the general reader does not expect a book-length novel when he sees the phrase.)

DOWN TO EARTH Editor:

I have just read my first issue of *Future*; I enclosed the preference coupon, so will not comment on each story. For awhile, I was afraid that the stories were to be pure space-opera, but further in, I found stories much to my liking, especially "The Long Return". I think the Martian and Venusian herein portrayed to be very fine and attractive characterizations.

Incidentally, I imagine most of the fans have by now heard the two radio programs based often on old favorites in science fiction—"Dimension X" and "2000 Plus". Sometimes new scripts are used. Very well done, usually.

Someone mentioned covers in this department. I have read many letters on the subject in other magazines, and it would seem that almost none of the fans like the lurid covers, while editors maintain that they are needed to sell the magazine. Personally, I wish they could be so designed that I could leave them around the house without further undermining our already shaky decor. You and I may know that the covers are not a fair representation of the type of literature within, but do our friends or visitors? How about a double-cover? Tear off the cheesecake and bug-eyed monsters, and find something more intelligent or artistic—say, space-ships, abstracts, astronomical paintings. After all, the picture

"Destination Moon" is doing all right without bathing beauties.

You ask what we think about paying for letters? I think it is very kind of you. I, for one, would prefer to take the pay in subscription form, if my letter were used—I think lots of readers would. Your price is very attractive, of course. I am very glad to discover you.

PS—Very fine letter from Robert Peck. And he is right. But I think that just as many science fiction stories maintain that "we" are the no-goods, unworthy even of survival, whereas there may be other cultures superior in every way. Evidently, many writers are well aware of the moral deficiencies and the infinite gap between our scientific and social progress. A good trend, and much more intelligent than the old space-opera attitude: "Here comes an alien ship; fire!" There is such a difference in humans that it sometimes seems impossible for them all to belong to the same species.

—M. Suckney, 307 W. Fairview Blvd.
Inglewood, California

(The "we are wicked, they are pure" theme is a welcome reversal, at times, but it seems to me that the entire issue betrays something unhealthy; by which I mean that a truly "same" and "rational" culture might not be in the least concerned about the so-called "superiority" and/or "inferiority" of other cultures, races, species, individuals, etc. The very idea might be alien to them.)

We hope you still find the price reasonably attractive.)

Dear Editor:

I picked up a copy of your September edition the other day. I like your magazine—well enough to become a regular reader.

Science fiction has matured considerably since I first became interested in it way back in 1939. I was barely able to toddle over to the space port in those days. Your magazine represents to me some of the finest science fiction work I have seen in those twelve years.

About the art work: The cover was all right, if you like that kind of cover—I don't. The inside work was good, better than most.

And the stories. I always read the short stories first. Here is the way I rate the stories:

1. "Wide-Open Planet". A very very good story—a story with a sense of humor—I think maybe it is the most interesting

[Turn Page]

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I have ever read. It was actually thrilling, if I may say so.

2. "Invitation to the Stars". I am afraid there is more truth than poetry to this story—it may be grim prophecy. At any rate, it is a well-written work with some very skillful use of technique. I believe it deserves to live on as a science fiction classic.

3. "The Long Return". More good style. It was a little strange in places, but a good story.

4. "Flight From Tomorrow." Plot could have been better developed. It was interesting and original. For a novelet, it was fine.

5. "Iteration". I didn't like it. I couldn't dislike it; there was nothing to it. Still, for a nothing, it was better than some stories. Some stories have left a permanent effect on my health. Can something that isn't anything hurt anyone?

I liked the high grade letters you print in *Down to Earth*. Another thing that leaves permanent effects on me is that type of letter written by a self-styled comedian who thinks that he is a wit and is half right. I didn't see any letters like that in *Down to Earth*. Congratulations!

—Joe Stamey, Box 86, Cisco, Texas.

(I might suggest you take an intensive course in listening to soap operas, then see if "Iteration" still strikes you as having nothing to it—only this, for me, comes under the heading of "cruel and unusual punishments" which are forbidden by the United States Constitution.

Incidentally, referring to "Invitation From The Stars", one reader noted that he liked the story, and congratulated Henry Kuttner on his latest pen-name. Let's clarify the record: *Morton Klass* is not a pseudonym.

PS.—Neither is Henry Kuttner.)

Dear Editor:

In your otherwise acceptable review of "Shadow on the Hearth," you overlooked one of the chief flaws in the book. The theme is, generally, that atomic war is ghastly; it will effect you; there is little or no escape from it. The author was apparently trying to bring such unpleasant facts home to the general reader.

But, in the book, nobody dies! None of the important characters, that is. New York is bombed, thousands, millions slain. People perish like flies right and left. But the

main characters just get sick and are awfully worried. This destroys the effect the author seems to have been trying to make, because the upshoot of it all was, "well, it was pretty bad, but nothing terrible happened to us."

—Jerry Candler, RFD, Rangeley, Maine.

(To Mr. Candler, one medal for observation. This point got by me completely, I blush to admit.)

Dear Mr. Editor:

The cover of your September issue of *Future* was much better. In fact, the whole magazine was much better.

For one thing, you had a good lead novel, this time. However, it was not the best story. Your second novel, "The Long Return", led the list. "Invitation From the Stars" was second; "Wide-Open Planet"

third; "Flight From Tomorrow" fourth; with "Iteration" bringing up the rear. On a whole, they were all better than last issue's. "Iteration" was the only one I didn't care for.

The inside illustrations were all very good, with Finlay's illustration for "Wide-Open Planet" topping the list.

—Gerald Hibbs, Detroit Lakes, Minnesota.

(I suspect the great cover controversy will continue so long as science fiction magazines continue, and readers are able to write letters of comment. I did my share of backseat editing some years ago, when I was sure that I could turn out a better job than the men in the saddle. Now that I've learned some of the facts of editorial life, I wish I could recover the massive wisdom that was mine in my teens.

To all who wrote, but were not included, thanks—and pray bear with us. Your opinions on the stories are reflected in the rating tally below. RWL)

RATINGS ON THE SEPTEMBER ISSUE

Every letter, or preference coupon, which indicates how the stories were liked is counted. A first-place, or "liked best" vote gets one point, and so on. The total score is divided by the number of voters to give the point ratings. Actually, two decimal points is unnecessary when less than a thousand score-sheets are tabulated, but that extra point keeps otherwise tied-scores in their juster place. The lower the point score, the higher the story rating.

1. Wide-Open Planet	2.37
2. The Long Return	2.74
3. Flight From Tomorrow	2.83
4. Invitation From The Stars	2.90
5. Iteration	3.98

NEW! BOB WEST'S AMAZINGLY EASY "PICTURE METHOD"

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IN 2 WEEKS

OR YOUR MONEY BACK

Think Of The Fun
You'll Have



45 PHOTOS
SHOW EXACTLY
WHERE TO PUT
YOUR FINGERS
101 SONGS
Words & Music
INCLUDED

★ EXPERIENCED GUITAR PLAYERS have told me Bob West's "PICTURE METHOD" improves their playing tremendously and is ideal for beginners. Don't envy friends who are as popular because they play a musical instrument. LEARN TO PLAY THE GUITAR and hold the spotlight at parties, entertainments, or gatherings of friends. You will be amazed at how easy it is to learn to play the Guitar, even if you can't read a note of music.

Play in 2 WEEKS or YOUR MONEY BACK

Now let Bob West, radio's favorite Guitar player, show you how, with his sensational "Picture Method." Don't judge Bob West's "Picture Method" by any other "course" you have ever seen... This is an entirely new method. Most "instruction courses" have only 6 or 8 pictures... but Bob West's new method has 45 actual photographs! It not only teaches, but shows you exactly where and how to place your fingers, etc. Most others offer a few songs... Bob provides 101! Yes, 101 songs chosen for their radio popularity, so you can sing and play right along with your favorite radio programs or records!

SEND NO MONEY!

Just send your name and address to BOB WEST. Pay postman only \$1.69 plus C.O.D. and postage. Don't delay! Order NOW! Start playing beautiful chords the VERY FIRST DAY. Be playing beautiful music in two weeks or get your money back. Write BOB WEST, Dept. 540, 1665 Milwaukee Ave., Chicago 47, Ill.

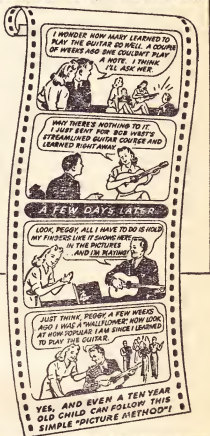
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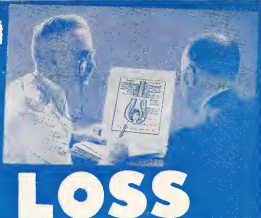
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The TRUTH about

**EXCESSIVE FALLING HAIR
ITCHY SCALP, DANDRUFF
HEAD SCALES, SEBORRHEA**

HAIR LOSS



WARNING!

The following facts are brought to the attention of the public because of a widespread belief that nothing can be done about hair loss. This belief has no basis in medical fact. Worse, it has condemned many men and women to needless baldness by their neglect to treat certain accepted causes of hair loss.

There are six principal types of hair loss, or *alopecia*, as it is known in medical terms:

1. Alopecia from diseases of the scalp
2. Alopecia from other diseases or from an improper functioning of the body
3. Alopecia of the aged (senile baldness)
4. Alopecia areata (loss of hair in patches)
5. Alopecia of the young (premature baldness)
6. Alopecia at birth (congenital baldness)

Senile, premature and congenital alopecia cannot be helped by anything now known to modern science. Alopecia from improper functioning of the body requires the advice and treatment of your family physician.

BUT MANY MEDICAL AUTHORITIES NOW BELIEVE A SPECIFIC SCALP DISEASE IS THE MOST COMMON CAUSE OF HAIR LOSS.

DANGER SYMPTOMS!

This disease is called *Seborrhea* and can be broadly classified into two clinical forms with the following symptoms:

1. **DRY SEBORRHEA:** The hair is dry, lifeless, and without gloss. A dry flaky dandruff is usually present with accompanying itching which progresses in this disease.
2. **OILY SEBORRHEA:** The hair and scalp are oily and greasy. The hair is slightly sticky to the touch and has a tendency to mat together. Dandruff takes the form of head scales. Scalp is usually itchy. Hair loss is severe with baldness as the end result.

Many doctors agree that to **NEGLECT** these symptoms of **DRY and OILY SEBORRHEA** is to **INVITE BALDNESS.**

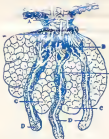
Seborrhea is believed to be caused by three germ organisms — *staphylococcus albus*, *pitryosporum ovale*, and *acnes bacillus*.

These germs attack the sebaceous gland causing an abnormal working of this fat gland. The hair follicle, completely surrounded by the enlarged diseased sebaceous gland, then begins to atrophy. The hair produced becomes smaller and smaller until the hair follicle dies. Baldness is the inevitable result. (See illustration.) But *seborrhea* can be controlled, particularly in its early stages. The three germ organisms believed to cause *seborrhea*, can and should be eliminated before they destroy your normal hair growth.

A POST WAR DEVELOPMENT — Comate Medicinal Formula kills these three germ organisms on contact. Proof of Comate's germ-killing properties has been demonstrated in laboratory tests recently conducted by one of the leading testing laboratories in America. (The complete report is on file and copies are available on request.)

When used as directed, Comate Medicinal Formula controls *seborrhea*—stimulates the flow of blood to the scalp—helps stop scalp itch and burn—improves the appearance of your hair and scalp—helps **STOP HAIR LOSS** due to *seborrhea*. Your hair looks more attractive and alive.

You may safely follow the example of thousands who first were skeptical, then curious, and finally decided to avail themselves of Comate Medicinal Formula.



**DESTRUCTION OF HAIR FOLLICLES
Caused By Seborrhea**

A — Dead hairs; B — Hair-destroying bacteria; C — Hypertrophied sebaceous glands; D — Atrophic follicles.

A Few of the Many Grateful Expressions by Users of Comate Medicinal Formula

"My hair was coming out for years and I tried everything. Nothing stopped it until I tried Comate. Now my hair has stopped coming out. It looks so much thicker. My friends have noticed my hair and they all say it looks so much better."
—Mrs. R. E. J., Stevenson, Ala.

"Your hair formula got rid of my dandruff; my head does not itch any more. I think it is the best of all the formulas I have used."
—E. E., Hamilton, Ohio.

"Your formula is everything you claim it to be and the first 10 days used I had a very bad case of dry seborrhea."
—J. E. M., Long Beach, Calif.

"I do want to say that just within five days I have obtained a great improvement in my hair. I do want to thank you and the Comate Laboratories for producing such a wonderful and amazing formula."
—M. M., Johnston, Pa.

"I have found almost instant relief. My itching has stopped with one application."
—J. N., Stockton, Calif.

"My hair looks thicker, not falling out like it used to. Will not be without Comate in the house."
—R. W., Lonsdale, R. I.

"I haven't had any trouble with dandruff since I started using Comate."
—L. W., Galveston, Tex.

"This formula is everything if not more than you say it is. I am very happy with what it's doing for my hair."
—S. M., New Mexico.

"I used it stop the itch and the hair fall. I am thankful for the help it has given me in regard to the terrible itching."
—R. D. L., Philadelphia, Pa.

Today these benefits are available to you just as they were to these sincere men and women when they first read about Comate. If your hair is thinning, over-dry or over-oily—if you are troubled with dandruff with increasing hair loss—you may well be guided by the laboratory tests and the experience of thousands of grateful men and women. Remember, if your hair loss is due to *Seborrhea*, Comate CAN and MUST help you. If it is due to causes beyond the reach of Comate Medicinal Formula, you have nothing to lose because our **GUARANTY POLICY** assures the return of your money unless delighted. So why delay when that delay may cause irreparable damage to your hair and scalp. Just mail the coupon below.

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RUSH THIS NO-RISK COUPON NOW!

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